Winging it
As passenger volume peaks, airlines cash in.

SHARAD KC

Magaast threats to farmers not to harvest grain, confiscation of land and looting of granaries has spread concern that Nepal’s already precarious food situation may worsen in the coming months.

Across the country, the Maoists are occupying farms taken from absentee landlords or confiscated from political opponents. There is no estimate how much land is directly under Maoist control, but reports from across the country this is a nationwide trend. Elsewhere, if farmers thought they could make a profit by offering the harvest for sale, Maoists threatened to confiscate them. If they were forced to hand over a part of the harvest to landlords, they were also forced to give the produce to local Maoist cadres.

Since the landlords know they won’t be able to collect the harvest, they do not invest any more in fertiliser, seeds or inputs. The farmers have been left with looking for whatever work they could find in order to get by, while the Maoists sold the produce for a profit.

In Rajapur winnowing grain.

Maoists have not only targeted rich landowners but also poorer farmers who they suspect of being informants, or those who refused to cooperate with them. All this goes against the revolutionary agricultural plan of the Maoist United Revolutionary Peoples’ Council that pledges not to confiscate land from farmers and lays out a land-to-the-tiller policy. So far, most farmers have been forced to hand over all their harvests to landlords, are now forced to give the produce to local Maoists. Food security experts say this has set off a chain reaction of lower harvests, falling productivity and a general food shortage.

Maoist policy of confiscating land aggravates an already precarious food situation.

PRACHANDA FEELER?

Maoist supremo Prachanda’s busy week

With reports by Shalita Gaire in Nepalganj and Rajendra Nath in Nepalganj.

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A discrepancy between word and deed is one of the defining features of Nepali politicians. Pronouncements usually hide real intentions of the authority. A contradiction between a government’s policies and their implementation over a prolonged period hallow out a regime from within. And when such regimes finally fall, their collapse is not that it takes even in opponents by surprise.

After repeatedly asserting that the country was not being militarised, the prime minister has suddenly changed his line and accused his predecessors of starting the process. There is no smoke without fire and Gyan Prasad Koirala is indeed guilty of allowing the military to meddle in civil affairs by inviting it to begin pilot development projects in districts with security problems. However, that was an anomaly in a democratic system.

Collectively, the parties are trapped between the right and left. Their anti-regression logic is now tired, and they know that the people know it is a hollow slogan. Besides, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his colleagues have been in power for more than a decade, India announced it is resuming bilateral cash grants to local bodies with a first package worth Rs 500 million. To be sure, Indian aid to local bodies comes at a price: Nepal must meddle in civic affairs by inviting it to begin pilot development projects in districts with security problems. Anwarul Hoque Chowdhury hate each other so much that it is certain they will take each other down without anyone else’s help. Girija Prasad Koirala and Baburam Bhattarai hate each other so much that it is certain they will take each other down without anyone else’s help. They have a common enemy in the people of Nepal: corruption of politicians alone, ”It is a cost that the people will have to bear.”

The debate really should be over how to quickly deliver development in a time of crisis, not a constant recitation of the policies of the past. Sher Bahadur Deuba and Prachanda are likely to carry the weight of their past and their performances will be judged against them. If Sher Bahadur Deuba fails, his colleagues can replace him. If Prachanda fails, his team can replace his. But in both cases, the price will be paid by the people of Nepal.

The militaryisation of Nepali polity is growing at the expense of traditional models of efficiency, not charging for services. Were the NEA and NTC, those institutions managed by NEA and NTC officials, those institutions managed by Nepal’s army, the people would be hard-pressed to find a better option. The NEA and NTC are both dying and have in fact already been closed down. But the government hasn’t done anything to bring them to heel. The NEA and NTC are both dying and have in fact already been closed down. But the government hasn’t done anything to bring them to heel. Even worse, the army has been allowed to enter the national electricity grid and take control of the NEA.

In the developing world, autocracies begin to shed their authoritarianism and take on a more democratic appearance. But the militaryisation lead us this time? Perhaps that explains the willingness of governments on the pretext of restoring order, justifying it by saying that elected leaders made a mess of things. The militaryisation of the state is due to the corruption of politicians alone. It is a cost that the people will have to bear. 

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And the British soldiers, who survived and came home heroes, threw their resources into defeated Germany, every bit as much as victorious England. The bomb shattered lives of Europeans, sparing no expense and pouring behaviour on a scale the world hasn't seen since. American largesse rebuilt victory for the anti-Nazi forces and a great outpouring of collectivist human other groups that somehow offended Hitler.

Even the battlefield and urban bombfield casualties of that war, though, engaged in the deliberate targeting of civilians as a tactic to discourage German side either, although few would argue that the Nazis were not evil to resolve conflicts.

The unexpected turnaround in tourist traffic also caught domestic airlines unawares, although they aren't complaining about it. Domestic airlines make more of their profit from dollar-denominated tourist taxes on flights. A tourist on a Pokhara-Johomson flight, for instance pays nearly four times more than a Nepal. Another money spinner is the Mount Everest sightseeing flight which costs $100.

On a single day last week, there were 25 flights to Lukia, Pokhara saw a record 107 flight movements on a single day in mid-October during a Moshar bandh, and Kathmandu airport has been regularly servicing over 250 take-offs and landings a day, most of them planes on domestic routes. "The airport is as busy as it was during the Visakha Year in 1998," one airport official told us.

Even state-owned Royal Nepal Airlines is responding to the demand. With seven Twin Otters, it has the largest fleet among domestic airlines but till last month only two of them were airworthy. "We made it a priority to get them flying again, and now we have five in the air," says Captain Vijay Lama, head of domestic operations.

Despite the surge in traffic, domestic operators have been cautious about expansion. If Necon starts flying both its ATRs, for instance, a lot of the pressure on other carriers could immediately ease. But that doesn't look likely.

Fish Tail's Bikash Rana, for one, has decided that this is the right time to expand. He has sold off his Exeter helicopters to plan an ambitious ferry in domestic routes with used Fokker F-50s. "There is a demand for domestic air seats which are not being met, we will fill it," he told us.

After its initial phenomenal growth following deregulation in the early 1990s, the domestic airline industry has seen a shakeout as the fly-by-night go bankrupt, and only the professionally run and efficiently managed airlines survive. At one point the number of operating license holders had reached a staggering 44. Nepal's domestic aviation history (and the airport at Kathmandu airport) is littered with the running hulls of airlines that didn't quite make it. Mountain Air, Lumbina, Flight Care, Nepal Airways, Everest Air.

Airline owners blame flaky taxation and inconsistent civil aviation policy for their plight. They complain that they have no incentives to compete, that they do not have spare parts at reasonable custom duties like they did in the past. "Initially, the policies were right and helped us grow, but they changed policies midstream and that has threatened our existence," Rana explains.

How does it happen that tourism since 1999 and especially post 9/11 when airline insurance premiums went up. In fact, the airlines that have survived are those who don't solely depend on tourist traffic and drive a proportion of their income from operating mush routes. Official with Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAA) charge private airiners with mishandling their companies. They say if policies were wrong, all airlines should have been equally badly affected. Even some private operators agree with that. "It all depends on whether you want to get rich quick, or you want to build an institution," says Buddha's Baneet. "Those who run airlines professionally have been able to sustain themselves."

To be sure, government policies have been baphazard and ad hoc. The mandatory requirement for airlines to ensure that 40 percent of their flights are to non-tourist destinations and remote areas is not enforced anymore. When asked, a senior CAA official passed the buck to the ministry saying they aren't allowed to exercise autonomy in policy-decisions.

Some investors are now flexing their wings to fly international routes. After keeping application in deep freeze, CAA has finally selected Air Shuang-La and Cosmic Air for international licenses. Air Shuang-La has permission to fly as far as Munich via Sharjah and other destinations, provided at least one of its twin aircraft is widebody. Cosmic's plan is to fly to regional destinations, mainly in India and is required to operate at least one jet. Both have one year to start operating, or else they will go the way of previous ill-fated attempts to start private international airlines.

Full circle

Doomed to repeat all our old mistakes.

This past week was one of remembrance of things past. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in the year 1918, a horrible war came to an end——the first war fought with modern technology but still using human cannon fodder on a grand scale. Many, many millions died in the conflict known as World War I, most of them from Russia and the territories that would form the Soviet Union. So horrified were the survivors that 11 November has henceforth been recognised in many countries as a day to recall the cost of war; not just by honouring fallen soldiers, nurses, workers and civilians but by renouncing violence as a way to resolve conflicts.

Of course, being human means lessons are rarely learnt from history. We repeat our mistakes, and often modernise them. The carnage and tragedy of Europe’s first horrible war of the 20th century was soon surpassed by the genocide and cynicism of the second. Not just on the German side either, although few would argue that the Nazis were not evil incarnate. World War II saw the British, American and other Allied powers engaged in the deliberate targeting of civilians as a tactic to discourage German war planners from their own bombing campaigns. Overshadowing even the battlefield and urban battlefield casualties of that war, though, were the victims of Nazi hatred—Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Poles and other groups that somehow offended Hitler.

Europe’s second descent into barbarism of the last century ended in victory for the anti-Nazi forces and a great outpouring of collective human behaviour on a scale the world hasn’t seen since. American largesse rebuilt the bomb shattered lives of Europeans, sparing no expense and pouring resources into defeated Germany, every bit as much as victorious England. And the British soldiers, who survived and came home heroes, threw their efforts into rebuilding their country politically. They voted for a socialist political party, Labour, that promised and delivered on some of the most sweeping economic reforms outside of Bolshevik Russia. Universal health care, unemployment insurance and protection for the weakest in society, these were as the hallmarks of the new, post war civilisation.

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Maoists in Manaslu

A Nepali journalist was kidnapped in the Manaslu region.

The people of Nepal do not want charity, they do not want handouts. Like anyone, they want to lead a dignified, meaningful life in their villages. To work, to follow the cycle of the seasons and their various rituals.

The Maoists are behaving in the same way as the hotelier did who told me in Kathmandu recently that if tourists got lost they were paid a war tax—between $40 and $100. According to the local Tourist Guide, most tourists are paying between $40 and $100 to see the beauties of the Manaslu circuit.

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The third war in Nepal

From a profound sense of crisis, says the World Bank representative in Nepal, a new wave of reforms is beginning.

Over primary schools to community management. Other countries (eg. Guatemala and El Salvador) have done similar work, but Nepal has done it breathtaking in its scope. The government has told all communities that they have the option of taking over the management of public schools, and in 2003-04, it expects 1,000 communities to sign on (out of about 20,000 primary schools). In health, 460 sub-health posts (out of about 4,000) have already been handed over to community management.

Fighting corruption: People had come to see corruption as the norm in politics and public administration in Nepal. Even when the legal power of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) was strengthened in 2002, many expected little change. Since its creation under the 1990 Constitution, it had won but one conviction. During the last fiscal year, however, the CIAA won over 40 convictions, and has changed the basic equation for the corrupt. To be sure, most of the cases involving big corruption are still pending, but what is noticeable fear now.

Financial sector reforms: The two largest and ailing commercial banks had accumulated estimated losses of about $450 million, nearly 8 percent of GDP. No doubt, much of these losses arose because the politically well-connected elite have abused these two banks. The reformers became convinced that the left alone, the banks would eventually bring down the whole financial system, and wreck the economy and government finances. The reform is already showing some effects at winning Nepal's third war: One pits the Maoist rebels against the government, the second is between the main political parties and the king. In fact, Nepal is fighting a third war: a war against poor governance, exclusionary and feudal social structures, and ultimately poverty itself. It is being fought mostly by less-than-feasible-looking technocratic reform leaders and an enlightened breed of politicians who have managed to keep day-to-day business of politics on the flanks and change advocates all across civil society. Some of the local level political leaders have been the important ‘field commanders’ of reforms. Unlike in the other two wars, no bullets are being fired and no mass demonstrations have been held. Yet, the consequence of defeat is no less serious than in the other two wars. Together, they could lead to nothing short of a failed state.

Despite the many positive changes that Nepal has seen since the advent of multi-party democracy in 1990 and the first wave of economic liberalisation measures in the early-1990s, stark and worsening inequities persist, not only in terms of incomes, but also of the fundamental ability of the Nepali citizen to participate in social and political decision-making processes. The Maoist insurgency is a particularly acute expression of the disillusionment over these adverse developments. After the Maoists staged violence in November 2001, the economy went into a tailspin and the government’s fiscal position weakened sharply. When this crisis did not seem to prompt the political leadership into serious corrective action, the frustration of many turned into alarm that the nation was heading for a catastrophe. It is from this profound sense of crisis that a new wave of reforms was born. The deepening political turmoil contributed to this crisis, but it also produced the space and creative stress for technocrats to begin implementing some important reforms. Nepal’s reform leaders already knew that unless decent public services begin to reach the poor masses quickly and their trust in the state is restored, Nepal would not have the foundation for either sustainable peace or meaningful economic development. Now was the time to act with the reforms. Serious reform efforts have thus emerged in a range of areas:

Public expenditure management: Nepal’s budget system had been plagued by waste, corruption and political interference. In 2002-03, Nepal introduced a ‘medium-term expenditure framework’. Simply put, the Government is trying to impose a realistic spending ceiling on itself, prior to spending through a transparent evaluation process and hold line ministries accountable for effective implementation of the agreed work plan. Nepal’s expenditure reform efforts are beginning to draw attention internationally as a little-known success story.

Public service delivery: For the last 30 years, Nepal’s centrally-managed primary education system has performed poorly. Last year, Nepal started the process of handing over primary schools to community management. Other countries (eg. Guatemala and El Salvador) have done similar work, but Nepal has done it breathtaking in its scope. The government has told all communities that they have the option of taking over the management of public schools, and in 2003-04, it expects 1,000 communities to sign on (out of about 20,000 primary schools). In health, 460 sub-health posts (out of about 4,000) have already been handed over to community management.

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Greater role of the private sector: Like many developing countries, Nepal’s public sector tended to be involved in too many things. This has been changing rapidly. For instance, to expand telephone services in the rural areas, the government has just selected a private operator to cover 538 VDCs in the Eastern Region. Such a venture is not viable on a strictly commercial basis, but instead of relying on the private monopoly, the government has opted to harness private sector interest by offering a one-time, capital subsidy to attract a competitive private bidder for this service.

These are only part of a much longer catalogue of reforms underway. To be fair, the impact of many of these reforms have not been felt widely yet at the grassroots levels. Only when many of the poor come to see the change first hand and regain confidence in their own government, will there be a foundation for sustained peace and development. Impressive and sustained reform efforts in many other countries have emerged after catastrophic events. Only such events seem capable of breaking down the entrenched social and political norms, and opening up space for a new vision and leadership. But, what a costly way to do what is clearly right for the nation. Nepal’s reformers refused to accept this historical ‘rule’ and instead held a bold attempt to avert catastrophe in the first place. While some countries came from technocratic leaders, many more in the political leadership now appear to be taking notice.

For example, the change agenda forwarded by HKI in the last round of peace talks with the Maoists, or the 18-point program of the agitating five party coalition. Samaras aside, the bulk of either composition is about social and economic reforms.

Nepal’s donors can only hope that Nepalis themselves will find the courage to see past political differences in the pursuit of peace through their first two wars. Education in justice and reconciliation, donors tell us, seems somewhat cautious in the past to acknowledge the progress made in reforms. Now however, many donors appear willing to give Nepal’s reform leaders the benefits of the doubt and provide stronger support to their efforts at winning Nepal’s third war. As Nicholson- Smith, the World Bank’s chief economist till recently, said: this is indeed a “special moment” for Nepal.

Ken Ohashi is the World Bank Country Director for Nepal.
Old and new Reasons why Nepali business’ old guard fail to impress our young turks.

There are many who still run their conglomerates in a traditionally closed, command-and-control “munshi-ji” style, forcing any employee with brains to quit within six months of starting. Others seem to spend so much time at politically-charged organisations like the FNCCI that you wonder—unless they operate on extremely high levels of energy (which is doubtful)—how they ever find time to work as CEOs of various companies that are exhaustively listed on their business cards. Still, the worst are those who, upon given a microphone anywhere anytime, see themselves as quasi-Planning Commission members, and start talking about national policies, when all that they can honestly do is turn, legitimised narrow business cartels and interest-groups. They, in turn, legitimised narrow business interests even if it meant distorting the markets. Over the years, one result of all this has been that whenever you talk of ways to make markets competitive and transparent in Nepal, it’s these old but politically powerful businessmen who are usually the most vociferous to oppose market-friendly ideas.

In this context, one strategy for coming years is dearth for any market-reform measure to succeed in Nepal, the fears of the old should be allayed while the optimism of the young need to be built upon.

Strictly Business

BIZ NEWS

Top 30

Nepal has figured prominently in the Lonely Planet’s list of 30 of the world’s top budget hotspots. The list, which appeared in various leading newspapers around the world, included Machapuchre described “as perfect as the Matterhorn, only bigger” and the legendary Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel. So, Nepali still has what it takes.

NEW PRODUCTS

HEAVY WEIGHTS: The global logistics giant FedEx began the FedEx 10kg and FedEx 25kg Box service in Nepal through their local agents Everest De Cargo. Designed to do away with strings, scissors and accompanying headaches, these boxes can be assembled and shipped in seconds. Even better, with one flat price for each zone, expressing international box shipments are easy and affordable.

OBJECTS OF DESIRE: Gadgets and gizmos galore for the 21st century home, all conveniently found under the same roof at Jumbo Electronic’s new showroom on the first floor of Hotel Classic in New Road. Brand names jostle for attention in home appliances, entertainment systems and state-of-the-art communication media in what the company says is the biggest showroom of its kind in the kingdom.

RELAUNCHED: Iceberg, the old staple from Himalayan Breweries was revamped and relaunched recently. The strong beer is all set to hold its own against other competitors, branding itself as “Freedom with Iceberg” and strong beer is all set to hold its own against other competitors.

DIAL IN STYLE: The new P900 from Sony Ericsson blunts the definition of a mobile phone with an inbuilt video recorder. It’s smaller, faster, simpler and more flexible than ever before. Based on the open symbian platform, it is a high quality phone providing full PDA/ organiser functions as well as a good gaming platform, it is a high quality phone providing full PDA/organiser functions as well as a good gaming platform.
hey say there are six directions in Nepal: north, south, east, west, up and down. And one of the most vertical places in Nepal is Pokhara. From barely 700m above sea level, the terrain rises within 35km to the summit of Machapuchre at nearly 7,000m. Very few places on earth have such a perpendicular topography.

And yet, what Nepal has promoted so far is only a horizontal Pokhara with the lake and the reflection of the mountains on it. There is a whole new Pokhara that a lucky few have discovered: its air space. Today, almost by default, this tourist town is fast developing into a centre for aerial sports, as ultralights, paragliders, skydivers and freefallers take to the skies in growing numbers.

Ultralight

The pioneer was Avia Club Nepal which started taking tourists on microlights (hang-gliders with engines attached) for sightseeing flights from Pokhara airport in 1996. It was tough in the beginning: the project initially ran into turbulence as government agencies found one reason or other to block it. Natasha Shrestha, founder and director of Avia remembers those days well. “For two years were just doing proving flights and trying to convince the government it was a good idea, but finally we convinced them it would add to Pokhara’s draw as a tourist destination,” she recalls. Today, Avia gets full cooperation from the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal and the Ministry of Tourism.

Getting the operating license was the first hurdle, the second was ensuring that the seasonal flights would be a viable business proposition. But marketing efforts are finally paying off. Despite a tourism slump this year, Avia cut more than 210 hours of flights in its three ultralights this month—nearly five times the normal for this season.

At 45 knots, the speed is just right, and the wind chill factor isn’t unbearable. As winter sets in, it is a good idea to wear a down jacket and gloves. This is just like riding a motorbike on a winter morning on the Ring Road. The only difference is that you are flying 4,000ft above the ground. We pass Sarangkot below us, and notice a Jomsom-bound Dornier has just taken off and is straining to get over Ghodepani Pass.

The descent is slow and the Annapurnas rise up to the north in a gigantic wall of ice and rock. Maximov cuts the craft off to level out at 6,000ft, the twin peaks of Machapuchre heave into view: a more elegant and dignified peak is hard to find on this planet. You never get tired of looking at it.

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From l-r: In formation with Mustapha Mafire and Francois Bovet, paraglider coming in for a landing on Phewa, Rajesh Bomjan takes off his harness, Natasha Shrestha at Pokhara airport.

Avia into a flying school for ultralights that will also show foreign mate pilots because there is nothing else like it in the region. Air sports groups involved in ultralight paragliding and hot air ballooning are also forming the Air Sports Association of Nepal to promote the industry.

Avia is also planning to start a Young Flyers Club on 17 December to commemorate the first flight by the Wright brothers 100 years ago to encourage young Nepalis to be interested in aviation. Avia’s Deepti Gurung is working with schools to get students from Grade 8 and above to join in a programme that will include familiarisation of aviation concepts and an ultralight flight.

Ultralighting in Nepal may get a lot of publicity after the Bollywood blockbuster Love in Nepal starring Sonu Nigam comes out later this month. Avia’s ultralights were used for shooting scenes in Pokhara.

Paragliding

Our next stop is Sarangkot, heading up in a jeep is a lot clumsier than flying, but we need to get up there so we can jump off the mountain on a paraglider. One of the pilots is another Russian named Ilia Milkov who is trained as a MiG-21 pilot in the Russian Air Force. We ask him a silly question: what is the pilot of an advanced supersonic jet doing滑行 thermal under a parachute in Nepal? Milkov is a man of few words. “It’s fun.”

Rajesh Bomjan and his brother, Binod, are two Nepali pilots licensed to fly paragliders. Rajesh takes his passenger through pre-flight instructions. (There is one embarrassing question about how much I weigh, which [deflects].) We go through tips on how to run downhill for the take-off, then how to hit the ground running during landing at the bottom of the mountains. “We sit in our hammock-like seats and start running like mad down the slope. Suddenly, without realising it, we are airborne, landing on a road on the banks of Phewa, Rajesh has adopted some raptors that he has trained to fly with him.

Mayadevi Lodge for refreshments. and we go into the nearby Newhouse

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Skydiving over Pokhara

Jorge, a Canadian of Venezuelan descent (right) has received honourable mention at the film festival in St Hilaire in France. We ask Rajesh if he would ever like to be an airline pilot. He shakes his head. “This is real freedom, here you are face-to-face with nature, you have to know about wind patterns how they behave along mountain slopes, no two flights are the same.” Rajesh has already logged 3,500 hours on paragliding and says there is enormous potential in Nepal to develop this sport. Pilots need to have at least 500 hours and a basic instructor’s course before they are allowed to take passengers.

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Corporate unreliability

If corporations had a conscience, they would act, without being forced to do so.

Today, we believe that individuals, corporations and institutions should be held accountable for their actions. But what should that mean, if it is to be more than rhetoric? For a start, it means debt forgiveness: international lenders may not be able to compensate fully the damage caused when their money helps maintain odious autocrats in power, but at least the victims should not be burdened by a disastrous financial legacy.

In South Africa, it was arguably the economic pressure brought by sanctions which eventually brought down the racist Apartheid system but, by the same token, it was economic support from the outside—including loans from multinational banks—which kept the system going for so long. Much the same may be true about Iraq during the 1990s. Those who contributed to maintaining Apartheid—and especially those who did not adhere to the sanctions after the UN approved them—should be held accountable. The Truth and Reconciliation process may or may not work to heal South Africa’s wounds; but if corporations are to be provided with incentives to do the right thing, they must now pay the price for the profits that they reaped from that abhorrent system.

If corporations had a conscience, they would act, without being forced to do so; they would act, without being forced to do so. If Apartheid’s demise has not solved the country’s deep economic problems, including an unemployment rate in excess of 25 percent.

So far, there appears to be no rush to make amends in South Africa, and, as elsewhere, the evidence is meager that the corporate conscience runs very deep. But it is to be hoped that the West’s legal systems will provide an alternative recourse, one that will not only partially restore past injustices, but provide incentives for corporations to think twice before profiting from brutal regimes in the future.

Joseph E Stiglitz is Chief Economist and Senior Vice President at the World Bank.

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Chief Economist and Senior Vice President at the World Bank.

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The Nepali Times
A press for freedom

Old laws must be revised to open new frontiers.

JAYAALIATHA

The Hindu

OF ASIA

Worry that the country’s defiance of freedom of expression is setting today in the case of The Hindu, a newspaper, which last week faced a harsh punishment of 15-day jail for its journalists for the “breach of privilege” of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly.

The breach of privilege concept goes back to the Middle Ages, when the still weak British Parliament was defending itself against an all-powerful monarchy. In the contemporary sense, legislative privilege makes sense as a means of protecting ministers of parliament from civil arrest, guaranteeing freedom of speech and debate in parliament, and preserving its status as the exclusive representative of the people. In the Hindustan, there was no evidence whatever of any attempt to insult or mock the legislature or lower its dignity. The paper’s reports were sober, serious and unobjectionable.

Jayaalitha first tried to give the whole issue a regional or even a status-versus-government character to mobilise Tamil-chauvinist sentiment. In particular, she objected to the federal home ministry’s willingness to grant the request of the federal home ministry’s willingness to grant the request

When it comes to going to Malaysia, ‘Dui Nombore Jaoa’, which means ‘going abroad illegally’ is a phrase much used in these villages of Tripura district in northern Bangladesh. So is ‘Golkata’ or ‘picture-change passport’, that is, a false passport with its photograph replaced. The dreams of working in Malaysia, nurtured and attempted by nearly all the men here, are rife with stories of being cheated by ‘takas’, the middlemen or brokers.

The Malaysia craze began here in the early 1990s and continued despite the Malaysian government’s freeze on the intake of Bangladeshi workers 1996 onwards, a freeze that was just lifted last month. By official counts, there are now some 113,000 Bangladeshi skilled workers in Malaysia, who had been extended a fresh five-year tenure last year. Non-government sources maintain that undocumented workers included, the number would be no less than 300,000.

‘I went in 1994, illegally, through a middleman,” says Mohammad Enamul Haque and fellow Bangladeshi male workers in Kuala Lumpur built the Petronas Towers, the tallest building in the world. They live in nearby containers.

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"The people have been orphaned."

Ajha Kura styled by Kiranoshth Radio Saugamath, 11 November

Excerpts from a radio talk program with Sanjay Adhikari of the UN’s Participatory District Development Programme (PPDD), the newly-nominated DCC-chairman at the Kathmandu and Humla, Bikram Thapa and Jeevan Shahi, and Kiran Bhandari of Kantipur newspaper.

Jeevan Shahi: Nothing is happening in the government, the people are being orphaned. The government had to step in to provide relief to the people. It had to act. In the two years since the DDCs were dissolved I have been in my district trying to do my best to push projects we initiated, like the Hilsa-Simikot road, or our nutrition programs. The people’s needs don’t wait for the politicians to get their act together.

Of course, the best option would be for us to stand in local elections and obtain the peoples’ mandate. But there is an extraordinary situation in the country, and we have to ask ourselves how can we provide basic services to the people. Are we going to wait for an ideal democratic process to be restored, while the people are facing an emergency because of the breakdown of services? There has been a lot of donor pressure on the reinstatement of local elected bodies since the days of Shre Bahadur Deuba. Since bureaucrats cannot run the local bodies properly, the donors’ stand is that if elections are not possible, let’s at least bring as many of the previously-elected officials back to run the VDCs and DDCs.

We all know things are bad, we can’t go to the villages. I am from a district which is best known for food shortages. I believe that despite all obstacles, we can get small things done for the people. But despite the security situation, we can’t give up, we have to try to do what little we can. We will start rebuilding, trying to work with whoever is there on the ground. We can never stop trying, we can’t let our country self-destruct. Bikram Thapa: I am accountable to both the people, and to the government. A representative once quoted, he is not convicted criminal, is still accountable to the people and it is petty to argue that we are not accountable to the people because we were not elected. Unless we get over the power struggles and allow at least some development, nothing is going happen. The government is saying, ok it is impossible to hold elections now. Let’s at least get some development moving, why not help them? I agree, nominating representatives to local bodies is not the best solution, but under the circumstances it is the best the government can do. But if we are doing the only to show the donors that something is happening, I’m not very happy with it.

Kiran Bhandari: The process is important, it is important whether a representative is elected or not. If you are not elected, there is no accountability towards the people, you are accountable to the person who nominated you. The situation on the ground is that outside the capital and some districts, development has ground to a halt. We all know this because of the Maoist insurgency. But after 9/11 the world is moving towards US-led militarisation and Nepal is also affected by it. The government is trying to get the local elected bodies to work as a counterweight to the Maoists activated, but I don’t think the VDC-chairmen are in a position to go back to their villages.

Sanjay Adhikari: We have to look at what are the alternatives in the current political scenario. You have. We are trying to do this as the best option, under the circumstances, to bring relief to the people through a participatory process. This is better than the vacuum that existed last year. Even if they are nominated, the representatives are local people who are still accountable to the citizens of the villages and districts from where they are. We are concerned about how support from the donor community can be most effectively used during this period of deficient political decision-making. The questions should not be about whether or not it is possible to get work done to reduce poverty, but about what we can do to concretely deliver development to the grassroots where it is needed most.

Cabin pressure

Chaudar, 9 November

All cabin restaurants in the Valley have been recommended for closure to the government by a research team which says these places exploit young waitresses to entertain clients. In response, restaurant owners say they are ready to remove all female staff to improve the atmosphere in their businesses.

The government’s decision will be far-reaching. Closing down cabin restaurants will only jeopardise the livelihood of those girls who could end up jobless and penniless. With no alternative, most will be forced into prostitution, exacerbating the situation.

At present, cabin restaurants are registered as cabarets and don’t fall under any specific category. Around 1,200 restaurants are registered with the government, with 80 percent of the 30,000 waitresses working in cabin restaurants. Owners who run a clean business blame the government for not introducing strict laws to control immoral activities. “It would be impossible for the government to close down the restaurants,” says a restaurant owner who says the NGO Must Nepal pressured the government into taking such an irrational step.

The owners, who have been paying more than Rs 8.8 million in taxes annually, are willing to bring in improvements that would include a minimum salary of Rs 2,200, uniforms, removal of privacy curtains, bigger cabin rooms and lower dividing walls. They also plan to provide literacy programs for the waitresses and punish those who promote immoral activities.

Gatekeepers

Samakunastri, 10 November

LIPING – Sahib Das Shrestha could hardly wait to reach Khasa to shop for clothing. But when he tried to enter through the Tapachen border area, Chinese border guards refused to admit him into China. “I don’t want to wash away some goods,” says Shrestha who was slapped around and made to turn back.

Local in Liping are complaining about the continuous movement of Nepalis by Chinese soldiers, despite proper documents that should allow them to enter Khasa. This action is a violation of the Nepal-Tibet Treaty that allows both Chinese and Nepali citizens to travel within 30km from the borders for the duration of a day. “I don’t understand why they are acting like this,” says Shiba Ram Ghal, chief of Tapachen Immigration Office, who personally went through a similar experience at the hands of the Chinese. As a lot of Chinese can be seen travelling inside Nepal without any papers. They are never questioned or stopped by Nepali immigration officers, but Nepal are harassed with guards manhandling even those with legitimate papers.

“The pipal pips were exchanged on the first day, a grenade left behind by the Maoists accidentally killed two children. The people, although desperate, were in despair. The CDO office building had been destroyed, Maoist corps still in the town. It was a difficult start. The first thing I did was to assemble the local people and politicians to discuss the situation, with their consensus, we used the state fund of Rs 1 million to rebuild the CDO office, the District Police Office and the Regional Police Post. With the remaining money, we restored Chauda, Nath School and temple. After that came the task of managing our local government bodies. Three VDC secretaries had resumed work during the ceasefire, but they left soon again after the rebels attacked one of them. The local administration worked stopped completely. So, I sent a letter to the local Maoist commander to seek his support. It wasn’t long before the Maoists sent Angul Mabhar to participate in our mass interaction program. It was then that Mabhar agreed that VDC secretaries would not be mistreated. Soon, all 30 VDC secretaries were back in operation. Things were getting better.

But after I reached the Maoist-affected Tapachen, I received an unpleasant news of a minor encounter between the security forces and the Maoists. The government had sent the army to run a relief program and the rebels wanted to run the army out. The accords filed their posts and are now based in Khalanga, the district headquarters.

The Maoists are spreading terror in the villages and we have not been able to reach them. We have nothing but a few VDCs. But things will get better once the government discharges additional armed police forces. Right now, the local police lives under extreme fear, especially after new rumours that the Maoists are planning an attack. As for me, I live in a government quarter guarded by six civilian policemen. I have to be home by 8pm and my wife and children for my job. I am not running away, no matter what happens.”

Top wall: Constitution of Nepal, 1990
Madhav Kumar Nepal: No matter how hard I try, I can’t squeeze out a single drop. Girja bahu!

QUOTE OF THE WEEK
"We urge the agrarian parties not to doubt our commitment towards the multiparty system." - Prachanda on www.cpnm.org, 13 November

Words worth
Rishikesh Danai in Space Time, 9 November

Religion is a way of life for Rimpoch Tenzing Jiangbo Sherpa of Tengboche. Although daily rituals at the monastery keep him occupied, a year ago he began working on a Sherpa dictionary. He met two Koreans working on a similar project last year and was impressed by their efforts. The lopchomo worried that words would be distorted by foreigners who may not have the necessary grip of the language. He summoned him to begin his own Sherpa dictionary. I have already finished the basic work,” says the chief abbot, pointing to files where he has a handwritten collection of Sherpa words. The rimpoche is pleased with a computer a local linguist is using. “I have read Sherpa books for a long time but only recently realised how difficult translations can be.” Once the work is finished, even non-Sherpas will understand the rimpoche worry that words would be distorted by foreigners who may not have the necessary grip of the language. He summoned him to begin his own Sherpa dictionary. I have already finished the basic work,” says the chief abbot, pointing to files where he has a handwritten collection of Sherpa words. The rimpoche is pleased with a computer a local linguist is using. “I have read Sherpa books for a long time but only recently realised how difficult translations can be.” Once the work is finished, even non-Sherpas will understand the
We wished there was someone who could understand Burmese. Despite our total ignorance of the local language, we went into a Naga village. Keeping with Naga customs, he was thoroughly filthy, making him look older than what I estimated was his age, about 45-year old. “Sya, do you speak Burmese?” I asked politely. “Sya” in Burmese means “respectable man”. He replied that he understood a little. We told him we were hungry and tired and asked if some rice could be spared. He said there was no rice on that side of the hill. We told him we were dying with hunger and asked what their staple diet was. He replied that they made gruel out of rice, which was about three milk cans of rice. Our expectation was that the shopkeeper could spare any. We informed the major about the cost of the goad and offered to return the balance. He, however, refused and asked us to keep it. He asked us to slaughter the animal and skin it. All he asked for was a leg, the rest we cleaned, cut and prepared to cook.

Social Science Bahá’í and Enabling State Programme/DfID invite you to a public lecture

Affirmative Action in Nepal: Learning from Experiences Elsewhere.

Speaking on the occasion will be Prof Neera Chandhoke from the University of Delhi and Prof Nico Steytler from the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Time: 10.00 am
Date: Tuesday, 18 November, 2003
Place: The Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari

Please check out www.himalassociation.org/baha for background information on the lecture and profiles of the speakers.
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

With the overnight temperature in Kathmandu dipping into single digits, an inversion layer traps pollutants, making the air quality worse. Throughout last week, the levels of PM10 (small particles that can enter the human body) in urban areas such as Putali Sadak, Patan hospital and Thamel were in the red zone, in excess of 200 microgrammes per cubic meter. For health reasons, we were in the red zone right through, breathing particulates that are harmful to health. The average PM10 for last week was 183 microgrammes per cubic meter which is almost twice the level for the level for last week. Similarly, roadside areas of Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital showed PM10 up by 70 percent.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

The Nepali government has declared a state of emergency in the Kathmandu Valley, with police enforcing strict lockdown measures to control the spread of COVID-19. The lockdown comes into effect on April 27 for a period of 15 days.

Nepali Weather

A trans-Himalayan low pressure area brought afternoon showers across the central region of Nepal this week, with strong winds causing localized flooding and mudslides. The weather conditions have led to the closure of several roads and bridges in the region.

Nepali Cinema

The Nepali film industry continues to see a surge in demand for local content amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Nepali Film Council has extended the deadline for the submission of films for the upcoming Film Festival.

Nepal Tourism

The Tourism Ministry has launched a campaign to promote domestic tourism in Nepal, with a focus on showcasing the country's natural beauty and cultural heritage.

Gardening

The government has encouraged citizens to engage in gardening as a way to promote greenery and improve air quality in the city. The Ministry of Agriculture has launched a campaign to promote the practice of urban gardening.

Kathmandu Valley

The Valley is experiencing a period of heavy rain and flooding, with the river levels rising and causing concerns for downstream areas. The government has urged residents to remain vigilant and take necessary precautions.

ATTENDANCE

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) has started with over 200 countries attending in person or virtually. The conference aims to address the need for a sustainable future for all.

Buddhist Festival

The Buddhist festival of Gai Jatra began in Kathmandu, with people wearing black and mourning the loss of loved ones. The festival is celebrated annually to remember the deceased and seek blessings from the Buddha.

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FOOD

EATING MY WORDS

Kathmandu’s Tempura Top 10

by BHAUTAMA BHAU

Spartan conditions have led to a higher overall standard of Japanese cuisine in the Valley.

The philosophy of Japanese cuisine, when it first made its entrance onto the global stage, was not immediately appealing to the Bhutanese mind. A stress on balance, health and modernity mingles uneasily with a fan of Bhuddus. However, over the years, it has won itself an increasingly large space in my welcoming stomach. The simplicity is appealing. The importance of quality and fresh ingredients warms me further. And frankly the world is a better place for the ocean of wisdom that is Bacchus. However, over the years, stress on balance, health and environmentalists, please grumble

In Nepal, the basic issues of readers’ grumbles.) perusing his columns, that he likes read seared tuna. (Please note, this is a for the ocean of wisdom that is

The problem facing Japanese cooks in Nepal are basic issues of supply. Japanese cuisine choice is

fish-centric. Fish require more than a drizzle or two of water. And fish from the sea, when asked, regularly express a preference for salt with their H.O. So unless Nepal’s borders change dramatically (a tectonic shift perhaps?) a tour of Nepal’s fertile coastline and its rich bounty will remain

For now, the nearest ‘fresh’ sea fish is to be found in the New Road fish market. Bhaumara Bhai has traveled the route from the plains of Bengal to the Valley. It is long, dusty and hot. Those of a cavalier disposition should seek bright red gills and bright eyes. You have been warned. Consequently I have nothing but admiration for the Japanese restaurant owner—a woman (!)—whose

our stoic Japanese restaurant owner is forced to go just a little further off road. The style of Kathmandu’s Japanese cooking, to keep costs in the affordable, is home-style. It is definitely not the more performance art end of Japanese food. Spartan conditions have led to a higher overall standard. Japanese food compares well to other cuisines featuring in the Valley.

On my list of favourites is Royal Hana Garden in Lainpat. Once nothing out of the ordinary, it appears to have recently pulled its culinary socks up. It regularly indulges. The garden is peaceful and relaxing place to eat, although the tranquility is occasionally shaken by the music that drifts from a collection chosen by Mr Ebener. The last time I went, the Beatles were being assaulted by a choir. A gentle-friendly grumble will change the CD.

My choices when eating Japanese are firmly conservative, the result, I believe, of my initial trauma induced by their incomprehensible healthy eating philosophy. Therapy has done nothing to make me more adventurous. To open the batting, an unusual but pleasing dressing. Of the tempura, my taste buds disagreed. Don’t dine with me. I want your beans. Sweet. (Heinz beans?) my taste buds

Dakhar Mag Kose. I normally follow the tempura with California roll with crab (tinned, sadly). The rice in the sushi is as it should be, compacted but not overly sticky and the coat of sauce generous. Yummy.

There are a number of things that makes Royal Hana Garden stand out from the crowd. Firstly the service is just right. And this is enhanced by the efficient owner—a woman (!)—whose engaging and helpful style makes a very refreshing change.

The next difference is the delivery of complimentary treats in between courses that guide the non-Japanese glutin into the wider world of Japanese food. There is life beyond sashimi. The meal begins with a complimentary salad of mooli, carrot and seaweed salad in an unusual but pleasing dressing. Of the in-between course offerings that I have had, I particularly enjoy the tongue with wasabi. The dessert is yet another unexpected final touch. A bizarre sweet bean concoction duly arrives. Although my initial reaction was one of fear, suspicion and general sneering (I mean, sweet Heine beans?) my taste buds disagreed. Don’t dine with me. I want your beans. Sweet.

Royal Hana Garden also has hot pringles, but did Bhautama Bhai brave these? Japanese philosophy has its limits. Health and food should not be mixed.

Linking heaven and earth

Artist Sarita Dangol has been painting trees—and only trees—even since she came to remember. She explains: “What that would fascinate me when I first attempted landscapes were trees as a whole and in part; bent and fallen stems that are coarse and knotted, branches crossing and leaping out, and leaves drooping and withered.”

Little surprise then, that Sarita’s sixth solo exhibition, Creation and Creations, concentrates on trees. However, although her subject remains constant, her style of presentation has never been more different. Sarita has veered into a style that leans on expressionism with her old palette of blue and green giving way to warmer hues.

Her earlier work portrayed trees conventionally in light and shade as a nod to her formal art education. ‘Defining Trees’ in 2000 showed the trunks in her paintings beginning to grow branches that swirl and emanate. The roots are also being significantly depicted. In her later work depicting tree trunks follow no prescribed logic and are a riot of colours.

The poet Manjul, who was inspired by Sarita’s work, wrote:

When the Earth wants to meet the Heavens you must have the language with which to talk to them

Sitting beneath a tree, you can send the Earth up or invite the Heavens down

The poet Manjul, who was inspired by Sarita’s work, wrote: ‘Creation and Creations’ by Sarita Dangol is on exhibition at NAFA, Naail 16 28 November.

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Now give your family healthy & beautiful hair with Clinic Plus Shampoo with Protein Serum

Ajit Baral and Manjul’s poem translated by Maya Watson.

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(Ajit Baral and Manjul’s poem translated by Maya Watson.)

‘Creation and Creations’ by Sarita Dangol is on exhibition at NAFA, Naail 16 28 November.

Ajit Baral and Manjul’s poem translated by Maya Watson.
Timeless news
by Kunda Dixit

Illegal Aliens To Be Deported

KURUNG: Two Capsac monks who entered Nepal on tourist visas and have overstayed in the kingdom have been apprehended by the Royal Immigration and Naturalisation Service and will soon be deported to the Tyrolean Alps.

Their application for political asylum in Nepal have been rejected because the Immigration Court is not convinced that the hermits will face serious religious persecution from a rival sect if they are sent home. The brothers have decided to appeal the verdict, during which time they will be kept under lock and key.

And then, this editorial from the Godkhaprare:

Conquer now, rule later

Continuing the blinding into Kumaon, our gallant forces have routed the British at Nalapani. This is indeed heartening news, even though Col Kipling of the East India Company, Pvt Ltd in Calcutta has, predictably, poo-hooed it in an interview with Larry King. Reports reaching here from the front say a fierce battle had raged for days between its legs, although the exact position of its enemy was finally obliged to flee with its tail between its legs, although the exact position of its tail has not yet been independently verified at press time. The question that must be asked is this: now that Nepal stretches from Tista to Sutlej what are we going to do with it? Readers are asked to submit their suggestions by Friday, and the author of the best essay will be asked to run this country since the present rulers don’t seem to have a clue.

Lily Thapa was something of a child prodigy; at 13 she finished school, was 17 when she graduated from college and went on to become one of the youngest master’s students at Delhi University. But her family asked her to return home because her dying father, an ex-major general, wished to see his eldest daughter married.

Lily put her studies on hold and was married to a medical doctor in the army. She juggled motherhood to complete her master’s in sociology from Padma Kanya in Kathmandu. But her real education was about to begin. Widowed at 32 after her husband died of a heart attack while on peacekeeping duty in Iraq, she suddenly faced society’s stigma. Friends and family edged Lily out. “For the first time in my life, I felt lonely and ostracised,” recalls Lily, her old pain evident in her voice.

But Lily didn’t let this demoralise her, or make her bitter. She chose to confront head-on the social stigma that Nepali society attaches to widows. She launched a support group for women who have lost their husbands. “We always ended up crying because we shared the same pain. We were living sats, burnt on the inside,” she says.

It took a while for Lily to realise that society would offer neither pity nor sympathy. The widows would have to unite and help each other with financial independence and spiritual strength. Women for Human Rights was set up in 1994 and has been providing skills training and credit schemes for women to set up small businesses. The group is now active in 20 districts and nearly 700

From 23rd December 2003 we offer you weekly direct flights on Boeing 767-300ER aircraft with 24 Star Class seats and 248 Economy seats from Kathmandu to Amsterdam and undertake connections with other carriers such as KLM

Star Class

Single women beneficiaries have formed their own groups.

Pramila Nepal is a 24-year-old from Sindupalchok who heads a group of 24 other young widows like herself. “Lily did change my life when I had lost all hope,” she says. Pramila is among those working in a pressure group to ensure that women widowed by Maoists and the security forces receive compensation in their own name, reversing a growing trend of other relatives claiming compensation. “If it had not been for Lily, my children would not have money saved up for their future,” says 25-year-old Pramila Mandal from Siraha, whose husband, a policeman, was killed by Maoists.

Lily now considers her crusade against widow discrimination her life’s mission. She says: “All we want to do is to spread self-reliance and hope so that single women can help themselves and their families.”

(Naresh Newar)