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Achham's, agony Things have never been this bad.



RABI DHAMI and **RAJENDRA NATH** in ACHHAM

t has been nearly two years since the battle of Mangalsen that devastated this district headquarter. More than 107security forces and civilians were killed in that deadly night attack in February 2002.

The scars of that battle can be seen

all along the valley, the historic Mangalsen Darbar still lies in ruins. But there are deeper psychological scars among the people here that haven't healed. And now, fears of renewed fighting and the Maoists' closure of schools across these 12 remote districts have spread more uncertainty. Embargoes, blockades and restrictions on travel have made the people of Nepal's poorest and most-neglected region suffer even more.

News of the Mudhbara incident in which four school children were killed last month in nearby Doti has spread and parents are afraid their children may get caught in the crossfire. "It is tragic, so many parents here have sent their

Chhat Bahadur Shahi (left) herds his mountains goats from Mugu in search of food. He will be on the trail for a month. The ruins of the Mangalsen Darbar destroyed by the Maoists two years ago, never rebuilt

children to India and this is repeated all across the midwest," says Ram Bahadur Buda from Nandegada village. continued $\Box > p6$



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Another AIDS Day **RAJIV KAFLE**

Another year of talk, workshops, seminars and plans. We are spending a lot of money, but HIV infection is on the rise. And for people like me who live with HIV, nothing has changed

I thought change would do me good, so I dyed my hair blonde. The next day, a journalist asked me if my hair was discoloured because I was HIV positive. Last week, I was stuck in a traffic jam in a taxi under that big 'AIDS Birrudha Ekata' billboard near Maitighar. The driver turned to me and said he felt sorry for Karishma Manandhar because she had AIDS.

Common sense is not as common as we'd like it to be. Who can we blame for such ignorance? Are the HIV sensitisation programs effective? At this rate, can we halt or reverse the epidemic in Nepal by 2015, the UN's target year? One thing we know for sure is that we have to work to implement the national strategy against HIV/AIDS if we are to avoid 15,000 deaths per year by 2005.

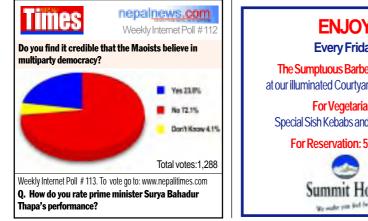
drug addict, runs a screen printing business. He has just finished A voung man, a former printing AIDS prevention themes on cardholders to be distributed all over the world. This man and his 20 young employees live in a part of town with the highest HIV prevalence among injecting drug users. He doesn't just want the business, he wants to help other young people like him. In Pokhara recently, I worked with ex-drug users. The 70-member group held daily meetings and planned fund raisers to support rehabilitation. They work with community groups and even have a football team: 'Recovery United'. This is the spirit that will allow them to meet the 'Free by Five' target of a drug-free Pokhara by 2005. There are an estimated 60,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in Nepal today. According to the UNAIDS estimate, we will enter a generalised epidemic by the end of 2005 as prevalence rates cross one percent of the adult population. This will mark the beginning of a vicious circle of HIV/AIDS and poverty. In two years time, there will be an average of 35 deaths related to AIDS every day and our already overburdened health care services will not be able to cope.



Deutsche Post 👷 World Net MAIL EXPRESS LOGISTICS FINANCE

It is time to start thinking of how we can all be a part of the solution to this looming emergency. We all have a personal stake in ensuring that the next generation inherits a future of less suffering and more hope. The answer lies with us. \blacklozenge

Rajiv Kafle is an AIDS activist. rajhiv2002@yahoo.com



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by CK LAL

28 NOVEMBER - 4 DECEMBER 2003 NEPALI TIMES #172

💪 EDITORIAL



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BREAKING EGGS TO MAKE AN OMELET

P olitics is not a spectator sport. We citizens are not supposed to just sit around watching gladiators finish each other off, especially when mortal combat in the arena spills over into the stands.

We want to have a say when our lives and security as citizens are at stake. The trouble is that the non-state side is so intolerant of dissent that it will send anyone who doesn't agree with the party line to kingdom come. And the state side recoils from the truth, labelling all scrutiny as unpatriotic.

About our revolutionary comrades, there is really nothing much one can say. They are behaving as they always have: with an extreme brutality calculated to sow terror, a strategy of winning support by fear, intimidation and threats. They justifying it with the catch-all line: "One can't make an omelet without breaking eggs".

Such thinking never made revolutionary sense and even goes against Mao Zedong's own tenets about not antagonising the people. But try telling that to our born-again comrades. How does keeping 400,000 children away from school in Bheri and Karnali help the cause? How does the public torture of villagers, and depriving those poor souls of dignity even in death by forcing the corpse to rot in the school yard serve the cause of societal transformation? Which values, exactly, are they trying to transform? Where is it written that barbarism wins hearts and minds? Some has to ultimately take moral responsibility for the fundamentally unjustifiable act of taking another human life. Naïve questions, perhaps, for those whose hands are steeped in the blood of fellow-Nepalis, and for whom thousands, even millions, of dead can be written off as means to an end.

The way to counter such savagery is not by being a savage yourself. You don't battle terror by competing with the enemy in terrorising the population. You don't stop the carnage by contributing to it. We don't pretend to be experts in counter-insurgency strategies, but isn't the state supposed to show citizens

that it is different? That it abides by the rule of law, and that it is there to protect the citizens from harm. And when civilians do get harmed, as they will in this fight, isn't honesty the best policy? To own up, and take steps to see that it doesn't happen again.

When it was dragged into this messy war exactly two years ago this week, the Royal Nepali Army had everything going for it. It had a good reputation, it did not interfere in civilian politics, and it carried a grand martial tradition going back to the days of the birth of this nation.

Today, even as the Maoists' violent path is alienating them from the very people in whose name they were fighting the war, the security forces face a sullen population and a reputation for trigger-happiness. When pressed, they take refuge in "they do it too" or "they started it first". For the state, that can never be an excuse.

Most Nepalis are trapped between unfeeling brutality on one side, and unnecessary ruthless on the other. Safeguarding human rights is not something the state does to keep donors happy, it does so because as the force legally mandated to bear arms its primary responsibility is to protect citizens. STATE OF THE STATE



Politics has become a game a chance where players make their move, and pray.

n chess, Deep Blue can defeat Bobby Fisher because both of them play by the same rules. Whether it is a computer or a human brain, in a mind game it is the ability to manipulate memory that decides the outcome. Politics has often been compared to chess where a king is just a pawn in the hands of the master player.

There is one difference: the winner of a political contest can't be predicted. Factors beyond the control of the player make the outcome unpredictable. Politics is, in fact, closer to poker. When Sher Bahadur Deuba upturned the chessboard last year by dissolving parliament, Nepali politics ceased to be a mind-sport. It became a game of chance where players make their move and pray.

Four players were simultaneously

making their moves last week. **Surya Bahadur Thapa** was put on a leash when the king reportedly asked him to proceed with his foreign visits ignoring the clamour for his resignation from his own party. Since his RPP is a royalist party, it doesn't seem likely that its move to oust Thapa began without a nod from on high. It follows, therefore, that Thapa cannot continue if the one who appointed him wants him out.

This is classic Panchayat-style powerplay: two groups of courtiers try to run each other down. Thapa is a veteran of this game and has been through it more times than he probably cares to remember. That is why he exhibited a certain panache in throwing earthy invectives doubting rival Pashupati Shumsher's lineage. The grandson of Mohan Shumsher is too sophisticated to stoop so low and ignored that remark with aristocratic disdain. In hindsight, this storm in the teacup looks like it was orchestrated on the eve of Thapa's India visit to show palace dissatisfaction with a premier considered to be close to New Delhi.

Reading, perhaps correctly, that Thapa's days are numbered **Comrade Madhab Nepal** decided to pull off a headline-grabbing India trip himself. His multi-pronged strategy involved a) isolating the Nepali Congress by patching up with Sher Bahadur Deuba, b) forming an alliance with RPP, and c) getting the consent of the Maobadis in Lucknow to accommodate the concerns of the king in a sort of consensus government led by him. But the plan backfired.

Even though the Lucknow meeting had the intended effect (it proved the Indians aren't averse to showing their abiding interest in the games being played in Nepal) the UML leader he failed to convince Messrs Dahal, Bhattarai and Mahara that he could offer them a better bargain than any other occupant of Singh Darbar.

Comrade Madhab is sticking his neck further out than he has ever stuck it before by declaring: "Constitutional monarchy or republicanism—the choice rests with the king". But that is unlikely to convince New Delhi to let go of real Maobadi in the hand for nominal Marxbadi-Leninbadis in the bush.

Slightly overtaken by the rapid pace of events last week, **Girija Prasad Koirala** took one step backward and declared that he wasn't averse to the reinstatement of Sher Bahadur Deuba government if that would lead to the restoration of the lower house. This innocuous sounding statement swiftly punctured the UML trial balloon for an all-party government minus the Nepali Congress. So far, the political earthquake Comrade Nepal predicted has not materialised and the only tremors are being felt on the slopes of Machhapuchhre.

New Delhi, as usual, has all its cards on the table. It showed its displeasure by sending the foreign secretary (instead of a ranking minister) to receive him at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. The unusually blunt joint communique at the end of the visit that called for a national government in Nepal was another indicator of Delhi's displeasure. In a field where 'protocol and alcohol' mean everything, such a diplomatic slight is noticed. Thapa has obviously failed to live up to the expectations of those who initially rooted for him.

By allowing the Lucknow meeting to go ahead, New Delhi once more thumbed its nose at Uncle Sam and showed it is ready to wear the Maoist millstone around its neck if that helps calibrate pressure on Kathmandu. The Indians are having fun.

All this has left the palace somewhat outflanked. Sher Bahadur Deuba has ceased to be the ace up its sleeve, and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's Kashi pilgrimage appears to have gone waste. Koirala has used Deuba to spoil Nepal's game.

Towards the end of his political career, destiny has thrust two choices upon the paterfamilias of the Thapa clan from Muga. Will he resign, or allow himself to be sacrificed one last time at the altar of power?

But he has a third choice. Thapa can also recommend the restoration of the lower house and put the constitutional train, derailed by Deuba, back on track. Such a decision will transform Thapa from a pawn into a full-fledged political player again. But will the pawn be allowed to reach the other side of the board?

HUMAN RIGHTS

Thanks to British ambassador Keith Bloomfield for calling a spade a spade (Interview, #171). Although couched in diplomatese, his message is clear, that the Royal Nepali Army



has to respect human rights because it is good military strategy. It doesn't make sense if you help Maoist recruitment by indiscriminate targeting of civilians. There are too many examples of historical blunders made by standing armies

> pushed into this trap by guerrilla forces. Some of these blunders have been made by the British Army around the world, and this is why Bloomfield's remarks ring true. **Col J Morton**,

> > • Keith Bloomfield should mind his own business and not poke his nose into the Royal Nepali Army's conduct of counterinsurgency operations. Through his remarks he shows that his true

LETTERS

sympathies lie with the Maoists. The rebels have twice hoodwinked civilian governments by going for a ceasefire they had no intention of observing. They manipulated the disunity in the corrupt civilian leadership to gain time, get their comrades released and fight on. Their force must be met by force, so that this war can be brought to a swift end, otherwise the Nepali people will be made to suffer a long-drawn conflict that may cost us our freedom.

Bickram Thapa, by email

by emailAfter reading your issue
#171, I get the feeling Nepal is
on the verge of collapse. It is in
a state of terror, human rights
abuses, landmines, daily killings
and a poor future outlook.
Outside Kathmandu, the
Maoists are acting more like
bandits than the freedom
fighters they once were. The
army, which used to behave
marginally better seems to have

lost it. A taxi driver is killed in Kathmandu by a soldier after a traffic altercation. Now, aid agencies are warning that unless this is curbed, no more money. So let me ask: where is the will for getting back on the road of peace? To the establishment and the political parties: open your eyes and for once act for Nepal, not for yourself. That is the reason Nepal is on this tragic path.

Lars Gundersen, Denmark

HUNKS

Charitraheen Chelis' choice of ten sexiest men in Nepali media ('Media hunks', #171) showed, among other things, the extent of the grip bahuns have over the Nepali media. Except Shyam Shrestha all the men chosen are hill bahuns. Can one safely assume that the self-declared women of loose morals, whose identity has not been revealed, are also predominantly bahunis? *KB Thapa, Balaju* • Congratulations to Charitraheen Chelis for tearing away their veils and giving Nepali men a taste of their own medicine. More power to them! PS: How does one join the movement?

'AS', Kathmandu

CHC email is: charitraheencheli@hotmail.com

UNKIND

Your editorial 'National sinkhole' (#168) and the letters it attracted have been a little unkind to Kathmandu. It sounds as if the people of Kathmandu have been manipulating development planning to locate all infrastructure in the valley. It is a fact that investments are being concentrated in Kathmandu, but is it the people of Kathmandu who are to blame for that? Donors cannot see beyond the hills surrounding the capital. NRN's want to build a tunnel to Hetauda which is meaningless

from a national viewpoint and only helps to bring the latest goods to Kathmandu by express delivery. Inhabitants of Himalayan villages are pouring millions on building monasteries all over the valley. Universities based across the nation are erecting grandiose campuses in the capital. Foreign-trained urban experts are calling for a second ring road in Kathmandu while their home villages lack mule tracks. Please do not blame the people of Kathmandu for the lopsided development. They have been working to spread development by leaving the comforts of Kathmandu to pioneer hotels and resorts in Pokhara, Chitwan, Lumbini and Jomsom, to take some recent examples. In the past, they were responsible for establishing towns across the hills of Nepal.

Mayju Tuladhar, Kathmandu



TESTIMONY

28 NOVEMBER - 4 DECEMBER 2003 NEPALI TIMES #172

Danger of a widening war

espite the initial promise of a ceasefire and a return by the royalist government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to negotiations, these peace talks steadily deteriorated due largely to a failure to establish effective confidence building and monitoring measures in the field. Currently, the conflict continues to take on a triangular dynamic between the Maoists, the royalist government and the mainstream political parties that have been shut out of power since King Gyanendra suspended the democratic system in October 2002.

Both the Maoists and the government forces have adopted new battlefield strategies as the war has resumed. The Maoists have moved away from mass attacks on district police and army headquarters, and have instead used small cells to carry out a steady assassination campaign, including in Kathmandu. Army, police and political party officials, particularly those party members that are seen as close to the palace, are the most common targets. The Maoists have also significantly expanded their activities in eastern Nepal and the taraiareas that had largely been spared the worst fighting earlier in the war.

The Royal Nepali Army, having significantly upgraded its firepower and improved base defenses during the ceasefire, has claimed a number of successful offensives and tried to carry the fight more directly to the Maoists. Substantiating the battlefield claims of both sides remains difficult, but it does remain clear that most of those being killed in Nepal are non-combatants. With both the Maoists and the Royal Nepali Army determined to use battlefield gains to secure leverage for future talks, the danger of a widening conflict is substantial

Despite mounting international pressure for the palace and the political parties to work together, King Gyanendra still appears reluctant to install a genuine all-party government or fully restore the democratic process, although speculation concerning a possible change in prime minister is an almost daily occurrence. Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa continues to stress the



The Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) is an independent, nonprofit organisation working through field-based analysis to prevent and resolve deadly conflict. This is a shortened version of a testimony by the ICG's John Norris at a US House of Representatives Human Right Caucus hearing on Nepal on 21 November.

importance of restoring democracy, but this commitment has not gone beyond rhetoric.

Both the Maoists and the Royal Nepali Army continue to commit human rights abuses on a widespread basis and there appears to be virtually no legal or political recourse for the victims of such abuses. The Doramba incident, and any number of others since the ceasefire collapsed, call into question the efficacy of international military assistance to and training of the Royal Nepali Army.

Maoist forces have engaged in equally serious human rights abuses, assassinating key political and military figures, robbing

banks and killing local journalists. Across Nepal, the Maoists practice extortion and these 'donations' are most often collected at the point of a gun. The Maoists' reliance on homemade explosive devices is a clear threat to civilians. There is credible evidence of forced recruiting by the Maoists, including a number of child soldiers. Most rural Nepalis find themselves caught between Maoist cadres and a royalist military often willing to use indiscriminate force.

On November 4, 2003, Prime Minister Surva Bahadur Thapa unveiled an initiative to establish 'Rural Volunteer Security Groups and Peace Committees' to fight

Maoist rebels. Nepali government ministers have argued that such armed village defense committees could better protect communities from rebel violence, but experiences from around the globe have almost universally proven civilian militias to be a disaster. With no training and no oversight, armed vigilante groups tend to intensify a conflict and the potential for such short-sighted policy to broaden the already deadly conflict in Nepal is distinct. Certainly, the US government should disavow any plan to arm civilians in a country where Washington is providing substantial military aid.

The administration continues to portray Nepal as part of the broader anti-terrorism battle, and has strongly backed a royalist government which has indefinitely suspended the democratic system. Last year, in addition to generous amounts of development assistance, Washington provided Nepal with more than 5,000 M-16 rifles as part of a broader military package worth more than \$14 million. Meanwhile, US Ambassador Michael Malinowski has taken a very tough line on the Maoists, comparing them to the Khmer Rouge and the Nazis. Though the Maoists clearly do represent a serious threat, such incendiary language has done little to advance the peace process. Washington has also pushed hard for a recently approved \$70 million World Bank loan to Nepal, over-riding concerns by some Bank members about Nepal's governance.

While US condemnation of Maoist atrocities has been rightfully quick and robust, too often the United States has treated serious human rights abuses by the government as little more than an inconvenience. The overall US approach to Nepal is certainly ripe for review and the immediate priority should be turning around the decision on village defense committees.

It may indeed take some military pressure on the Maoists to secure a lasting peace agreement. The arc of the war thus far has only demonstrated that unchecked human rights abuses by the government directly contribute to Maoist recruiting efforts. Nepal's return to violence is all the more unfortunate because it is not difficult to imagine a series of agreements around which the king, the Royal Nepali Army, political parties and Maoists could coalesce.

It remains clear that the sooner a genuine multiparty government is established and democracy restored, the higher the chance for a durable solution to the conflict. Washington is well positioned to use its influence to help the Nepal government move in the right direction.

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28 NOVEMBER - 4 DECEMBER 2003 NEPALI TIMES #172



Corporate advertisers need regular ratings polls to gauge popularity of new television channels.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

s competition heats up among the six television channels vying for Nepal's advertising pie, the significance of cable operators has suddenly grown by leaps and bounds.

Cable television distributors who control distribution in urban areas are being courted by frustrated channel owners. Viewers find it tedious to keep on changing the cable feed at the back of their tv sets, so the cable operators which provide the widest range of channels is ahead of the game. However, the Nepali market is complicated by the fact that the biggest cable operator, Space Time Network (STN) which controls 60 percent of the cable viewership, also owns Channel Nepal, the country's first private TV channel.

Since STN is driving a hard bargain, new private ventures like Kantipur, Nepal One and Image are trying to widen their reach through its smaller competitors. With so many channels, new cable operators have entered the fray and are trying to wrest a slice of the market.

Although there are 211 registered cable operators across the country, STN's dominance of the urban market has given them a virtual monopoly so far. But a sign of the cable wars to come are already visible: while STN does not carry rival Nepal One and Kantipur, STN's rival Sky Cable retaliated by temporarily taking Channel Nepal off its stream. "We have repeatedly requested STN to carry our channel," says a Nepal One executive here. "We will not give up, we will keep on trying.' Jamim Shah exudes the

bravado of a man who knows he dominates the market. But he hints at magnanimity. "We have ordered new equipment. Once we have them, we will see then if we will be able to include the other Nepali channels in our network as well." For now, Shah seems happy to harvest profits to recoup his investment in the the 3,600km of cable infrastructure he has all over the country and his Channel Nepal satellite television venture.

Shah's smugness could be shortlived if non-STN channels all gang up against him, or if Nepal One and Kantipur TV become so popular that his subscribers start demanding that he put them on. For now, the new private channels have no option but to woo small cable operators. Kantipur TV and Nepal One are also working on slick production and smart marketing so that their broadcasts will be hard to pass by.

Nepal One is buying cable connections for its viewers, even if they are already STN subscribers. "We would like them to see our product as well and then decide which one is better," an official with the free-to-air station being broadcast from New Delhi told us.

The past experience of Shangrila Channel is a lesson for new TV stations. When that private venture began airing day TV through state-owned Nepal Television, it failed because cable operators refuse to carry it. "The lesson is that the channels need cable distribution," says Neer Shah who now owns Shangrila wireless distribution through microwave.

The Ministry of Information and Communication has received petitions from operators that the government should ban cable operators from also owning cable distribution, as in India. "We are in the process of discussing if the license laws can be revised," one



Competition between channels and cable distributors is cut-throat, but viewers benefit from the choice.

official told us. But another official in the same ministry told us: "It's a free market, if any other television station wishes to begin a cable business what is the problem?"

The majority of operators want the government to make it mandatory for every cable provider to carry all Nepali channels. "That way, the government itself will earn a big royalty, a big chunk of which is now going to pay foreign channels," says Shah. Already, growing competition among cable operators has brought advantages to viewers. There is a wider range of choice, quality of production has gone up and more Nepalis are spending more time watching Nepali channels than Indian or foreign channels.

Meanwhile, STN is trying to keep its innovative edge by going digital and plans to introduce a cable internet service on its menu to subscribers. If that happens, with a few hardware add-ons and a keyboard, customers can cheaply surf the internet on their television set. Of the nearly two dozen cable operators in the capital, many charge an average of Rs 150 per month, forcing the big boys to revise their rates as well.

The competition among the big players may be cut-throat, but ultimately the Nepali television viewer has benefited from the cable wars. ◆

he entry of four new television channels into the market this year has lead to a growth in demand from advertisers of consumer goods for accurate ratings data.

But ratings evaluators are off to a rough start. A controversial media survey by an international polling organisation earlier this year has sparked off a debate about the credibility of such studies. AC Nielsen ORG Marg's survey of 'media habits' in April stirred a hornet's nest.

Among those whose programs didn't do well in the Nielsen poll were state-run Nepal Television (NTV) and its Saturday afternoon Bollywood film as well as the talk show *Dishanirdesh* hosted by Vijay Kumar Pandey. The Nielsen survey showed *Dishanirdesh* had a viewership of 1.5 percent. "I am not against such surveys but there has to be transparency on how it is done and the methodology adopted," says Pandey. "They must meet ethical standards." Pandey went public with his displeasure by placing ads in Nepali newspapers. Predictably, newspapers and stations that received better ratings and circulation figures were happy with the results and even splashed it across their front pages.

ORG Marg's Country Representative Palas Bhattacharya says Pandey's program had a low rating because it was not on air when the field work of the survey took place from November 2002 to January 2003. "If your program is not being shown, naturally people would not name it and that is what happened in the case of *Dishanirdesh.*"

Independent media analysts say they did find some discrepancies in the Nielsen ORG Marg survey and it contradicted the findings of other media polls done before and after it. *Dishanirdesh*, for instance, showed a 49 percent rating in the CEDA polls. "It did not tally with the findings which most of the other surveys had shown," said an official with a reputed marketing agency in Kathmandu, who did not want to be named in this article.

An ORG Marg insider admitted



HERE AND THERE



CONTRACT, MILLING, CONTRACT,

otherwise environmentally-minded, sensitive person employed abroad on a generous contract by a humanitarian or aid organisation insists on the worst possible type of personal transport. I refer to the vehicle known in the West as a 'Sports Utility Vehicle' or to us cynics in Kathmandu as an 'Aidwagon'.

Sometimes I think the United Nations and all other large international bodies have a secret deal with Toyota, Nissan and other producers of these monsters. That at least would make the whole thing comprehensible. The profit motive. We've all seen them. Many of us drive them. And I'm sure that we tell ourselves that they're necessary for the Nepali terrain, the hills, that road to Dhunche and of course, for safety purposes. Yes, they also negotiate the huge potholes on the Sanepa road quite well, don't they.

Hello! Your vehicle made those holes. Your vehicle helps make the roads of this city uninhabitable for the vast majority of Nepalis who walk. Or live and work next to the road. Your vehicle consumes about tens as much petrol as any other. Your vehicle eats up resources that your organisation could otherwise spend to help poor people. Remember them? The reason that you're here?

And don't give me any guff about Dhunche. I've been outside the British School or the Lincoln School when you couldn't move for a phalanx of fuming Aidwagons dispensing children. You use them for mundane household chores. You use them to go to Bhat Bhateni. You cruise on household business, hermetically sealed from the world around you, apparently without a thought for the effects of your actions.

A little mea culpa. I've owned two regionally-produced four wheel drives. One was a Tata Sumo, the other a Maruti Gypsy. Neither holds a candle to the Landcruiser or Explorer for comfort, ride or aerodynamic styling. But I'll tell you one thing. At least people in the region got jobs



from my vehicle, not some import-export middleman. Both were purchased from my own funds, earned by the sweat of the brow, or at least the typing fingers. I also paid duty and taxes on both, because I have no special status with any government, save as minor annoyance and occasional supplicant. Now I own no vehicle, and get around by taxi and battered Chinese bicycle. An economic decision that has served me well.

In America, people who drive SUVs are loathed by other denizens of the road. It's pejorative, to call someone an 'SUV person'. The connotation is greedy, uncaring and dangerous. Someone who would drive such an impractical and unwieldy beast, it's assumed, cares nothing for the amount of petroleum they consume, or the impact on other drivers and

Your vehicle eats up resources that your organisation could otherwise spend to help poor people.

users of the roadspace. They probably vote Republican or Conservative too. Now I put it to all you Aidwagon folks that you do not fall into these categories. You are here because you care about the world. You want to help. Yes, you enjoy your life abroad with all its perks and exotic extras. But you have a conscience. All this is leading somewhere. To a suggestion, a humble request that you reconsider a few things. I know, I know. You bought the vehicle from your predecessor for a fraction of its cost back home (duty free, therefore no benefit to Nepal even in its purchase). You have to think of the kids safety when you are on Nepali highways. And you never know when the office might want you to go on a field visit to some distant spot where your organisation is doing good work. Okay, I give you all that.

But try one thing. Have a good look at your vehicle and assess its impact on the roads and very limited petroleum stocks of this troubled land. Get out and survey the damage to the roads from the parade of Aidwagons that are making their way around the gin mills and bazars of Patan. Watch the plumes of pollution that spew from the exhaust pipe as your driver revs it up on winter mornings. Then consider whether it's worth it. Why not buy a Maruti Gypsy or something small and economical? Use the office four wheel drive on business trips to rugged bits of the country. Better still, buy some bikes and hire a car when you need one. I wonder if fewer Aidwagons wouldn't make this city a better place to live. \blacklozenge

ratings game



Vijay Pandey says the low atings of his *Dishanirdesh* in a media survey was unfair.

to us that some components of the survey may have misrepresented raw data gathered during a certain period (the last two months of 2002 and in January this year) that gave distorted results.

"Media surveys at times when there are so many players are critical because everyone claims to be number one and advertising agencies need to properly direct their clients to the right media outlet," explains Joydeb Chakravarty, director at Thomson Nepal.

But accuracy demands bigger sample size and the bigger the survey, the more expensive it is. Sometimes, sponsors of particular surveys influence what goes in or stays out of a poll, especially if it includes a product range manufactured by a sponsor.

With the increase in the number of media outlets in Nepal, the frequency of media-related surveys has gone up and there are high stakes in showing impressive ratings and circulation. So far, they have been conducted by different private organisations with differing approaches, or tied to other consumer surveys. "Most of the time, they have been tagged along other surveys," says Chakravarty.

And that is not accepted as a healthy practice. "How can you talk



Joydeb Chakravarty of Thomson Nepal says businesses would benefit from reliable ratings.

about media survey when you are actually doing a survey on cigarette smoking?" Bhattacharya asks. In most parts of the world, media surveys are conducted under the norms of international protocols like the Audit Bureau of Circulation, Media Readership Survey, Television Audience Measurement or IMRB International. Nepal has none of these.

The Press Council does bring out ratings for newspapers and publications every year, but its evaluations on circulation and quality have gaps. "You can't really compare the national dailies published in Kathmandu with periodicals published outside and keep them in the same category," says Kulchandra Wagle, former president of Nepal Press Union.

Ever since the monopoly of staterun media ended after 1990, private media have hired pollsters to conducted media surveys. Some say this opens up conflict of interest issues and the possibility of such surveys being manipulated by sponsors. "That is why the source of funding of such surveys must be made open," Vijay Kumar Pandey maintains.

There is a remedy: selling the survey to corporate subscribers. "If there are subscribers to such surveys, the surveyor will not have a problem

Palash Bhattacharya of AC Nielsen has started subscribe based monthly media polls.

financing a poll and will also be responsible to a diverse range of clients for the same results," says Thomson's Chakravarty.

Equally important is the methodology involved. TV viewership depends on variables that cannot be ignored and if a study is to be credible they must be taken into account. For instance, the peak viewership during World Cup Football cannot compare with normal audience numbers.

"That was exactly what had happened regarding our survey on *Dishanirdesh*," admitted AC Nielsen's Mani Raj Dahal. "The program was off-air when we had our survey."

Nielsen has now launched monthly media surveys in urban centres. The results for September have already been delivered to clients, four of which are big business houses and major advertisers. Each client pays Rs 150,000 to subscribe to the entire survey result. The price is less for different segments of the media.

Advertising agencies and marketing agencies who have seen the results of the ORG Marg monthly media polls say the discrepancies seen in one-off polls appear to have been ironed out and the results are now more consistent with other surveys. \blacklozenge NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

US Peace Corps/Nepal Vacancy Announcement

Peace Corps/Nepal invites applications from interested and qualified candidates for the position of Registered Nurse to work in the Peace Corps Medical Unit in Kathmandu under a Personal Service Contract.

Qualifications: Graduate Registered Nurse or BS in Nursing - degree obtained from the U.S., U.K., Canadian or Australian academic institution would be preferred. Qualified candidates will hold a current, active, valid license to practice at the level of her/his education, training and credential.

Experience: Minimum 5 years nursing work experience and previous experience as a Peace Corps Medical Officer is strongly preferred.

Major Responsibilities: To provide health care to American Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Nepal. Duties include diagnosis, treatment and management of common illnesses and injuries, triage and appropriate referral of Volunteers with health problems, the provision of health education classes and on-going health education to the Volunteers, basic psychological counseling and emotional support and participation as a member of the Peace Corps staff and management of the Volunteer Health Care Delivery System in Nepal including the maintenance of medical supplies and equipment inventory. Extensive travel throughout Nepal to conduct sites assessments of Volunteer living and work sites is necessary. Occasionally, international travel is required. To provide on call coverage during holidays and weekends, approximately every third week or when scheduled. Detailed job description available at the Peace Corps Reception desk.

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Candidates must submit a completed application for employment available from the Peace Corps Reception Desk at the address listed below between 8:00 am. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Applications should reach Peace Corps by Monday, December 29, 2003. Candidates must also submit clear photocopies of license and degree or diploma. Applicants are required to quote their minimum expected salary. No telephone inquiries will be entertained. Only those selected for interview will be contacted.

Peace Corps encourages applicants from minorities and disadvantaged groups

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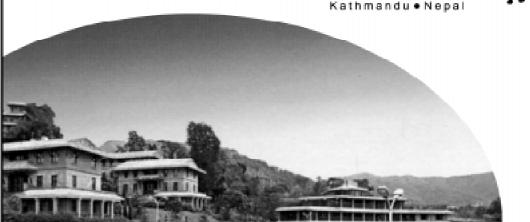
Women in arms

For the first time, the Royal Nepali Army has begun recruiting women for non-technical posts. It will recruit 100 women in the office of the military police, as office runners, computer operators, drivers and band musicians. "Even if they are being recruited in these posts for now, they can be used in the fighting force in the future," a senior official at the army headquarters

Since the breakdown of peace talks in August, there has been a rise in extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary detentions. "A large number of people have been held incommunicado in army barracks. Officers at army barracks have been refusing to accept habeas corpus notices issued by the Nepal Supreme Court on behalf of detainees," said a press statement by International Commission of Jurists.

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told us. The officer said temales would not be sent to the frontlines right now because of the lack of appropriate infrastructure. "Once they are ready, we will deploy them even in the field."

Sharing life

In May this year, Kodak and Photo Concern pledged to set aside Rs 2 for Nepal Cancer Relief Society from every roll of film developed and printed at each of the 29 Kodak outlets around the kingdom. Last week they handed over Rs 500,000 to top off an earlier instalment of Rs 200,000. Nepal Cancer Relief Society helps cancer patients who cannot afford expensive medical care.

Monitors at work

Nepal Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has received support from international rights groups to initiate independent human rights monitoring of the conflict. But despite constant alerts, the government has ignored its call to establish five regional monitoring units in cooperation with the United Nations.

Instead, the government has proposed a parallel human rights cell in the prime minister's office. It is known that the army is not happy with the NHRC's findings on the Doramba and Mudhbara incidents.

OUR CHEVY: The all-American carmaker, Chevrolet is coming to the Himalaya with the Optra, the first in the lineup introduced by Vijaya



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NATION

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"There is a famine in our villages right now."

from 🖒 p1

Nearly all the 342 schools in the districts has been shut due to Maoist threats to close schools in Bheri and Karnali Zones. Some 45,000 students in Achham alone are staying home, teachers have fled because the Maoists just raised the revolutionary tax to 15 percent of their meagre salaries. The village teachers while away their time in Mangalsen. "All the teachers do is sign the attendance register and sit in the sun," says Basudeb Timisilna, district education officer.

CDO Surya B Shrestha has come up with a solution to re-open schools, but there are no takers. "We are thinking of sending mobile army patrols so schools can open," he says. But locals fear that this will only provoke the Maoists, and there could be a repeat of the Mudhbara firefight on 17 October in which classrooms became a battleground.

The only schools that are open are in the district headquarters where there is a security presence. These are bursting at the seams because they have enrolled new students who have fled their villages. Public Campus, Sodsa Devi in Mangalsen, Mahendra in Bayalpata, Tripura in Shri Kot are overflowing with students. "I have no choice but to admit as many students as possible," says Prem Kunwar, principal of Tripura Sundari High School. "Where else

would they go?"

At the entry point into Achham from Doti in Chaukhutte, Maoists check all visitors, questioning them to see if they are military spies. This is where the Maoists looted grain from businessmen just before Dasai, and since then they have imposed a blockade on food and other items passing through. The Maoist sentries say this is to stop rations from reaching security personnel up the valley and in the district headquarters. "It is our strategic move," says Shyam, who is a Maoist posted in Chaukhutte. "It will drive the army and police away."

As is usual in these matters, the security forces have just started flying in food and it is the local inhabitants who suffer. The price of basic foodstuffs is now beyond their reach, the people just don't have the money. Jit Bahadur Shahi of Rahaf VDC has seen enough, he is off to India to find work. "Helicopters fly food for the soldiers and government officials everyday, but we can't afford to buy food. I'm leaving," Shahi says. There are many more like Shahi along this trail.

Achham and other mid-western districts were food deficit areas even at the best of times, with farmers never able to grow enough to feed themselves for more than six months a year. They have always migrated to India seasonally from here, but this time the migrations are more permanent. The Maoist blockade and the army's restriction on food transport has lead to famine-like conditions. Blockades here in Achham

From I-r: By early morning, Paru Bhandari is on the trail with her goat train, heading back to her village in Bajura. Chaukhutte on the Doti-Achham border where the Maoists have set

up a food blockade. This primary school in Duni in Achham is among 342 school in Achham that have been closed down.

have impacted food security north in Bajura and Mugu as well.

People have no choice but to walk for weeks to reach Chaukhutte in Doti. With almost all the men gone, women make the journey taking herds of mountain goats and sheep to carry home supplies. We run into Paru Bhandari along the trail who has left her children in Bajura and has come down to see if she can find some food. "There is a famine in our villages right now," she tells us. It has been three years since Nepal Food Corporation stopped supplying grain in the area to cover the deficit.

Chhat Bahadur Shahi has come from Mugu and he says shops along the trail don't even have matchboxes. He has walked 11 days to arrive in Chaukhutte with 13 other villagers to buy food and basic needs. It will take him another two weeks to walk back. He says: "Sometimes, by the time we reach home, we have nothing left from what we bought. Things have never been this bad." \blacklozenge





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ECONOMY

INTERVIEW

"Overall, the situation is not so gloomy."



Qatar Airways began flying to Nepal in 1995. Since then, it has projected itself as one of the most convenient connections to the Middle East and Europe. The carrier has increased its share of the market and has just added more flights on its Doha and Kuala Lumpur links. *Nepali Times* spoke to Qatar's area manager, Gyan Amerasinghe, about future plans.

Nepali Times: Why did Qatar Airways recently increase flights to Kathmandu despite the tourism slump?

Gyan Amerasinghe: Yes, we have gone up to 15 flights a week-11 to Doha and four to Kuala Lumpur. I find it difficult to believe that Nepal has lost a lot of tourists. All our flights are coming in full and so are others like Gulf Air. Even Thai has upgraded Kathmandu flights to Boeing 777s so I really don't think the overall picture is so gloomy.

Admittedly, this season is looking better, but compared to three years ago, it has declined.

We base our assessments on customers coming in from Europe like UK, Germany, Italy and France. We've seen a huge demand from that sector, which prompted us to increase flights into Kathmandu. It all comes down to inbound traffic.

So can we infer that Qatar is holding its own in the international market?

We are doing very well, actually Qatar is one of the fastest growing airlines in the world and certainly the fastest growing in the Middle-east.

Does Qatar have a target clientele?

The majority of our business comes from the labour market. For instance, we started with two flights in April to Kuala Lumpur, now we have gone up to four flights. That demand is actually from the Nepali labourers working in Malaysia. Similarly for west-bound traffic. But of course there's a mix of transnational labour, business and students. The majority of Kathmandu's clientele comes from the labour market. Qatar hopes the situation of the country changes and there will be more business travel.

Both Qatar Airways and Royal Nepal started the Kuala Lumpur flights together and now you compete. How did you manage to pull this off, considering governments usually gives national flag carriers preference?

Traffic rights are discussed between the two governments and we received traffic rights allowing us to operate to three points out of Kathmandu. We

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Dharan's secret

isiting Dharan in eastern Nepal last week, what was most noticeable were clean, wide and black-topped roads that led to residential areas dotted with lavishlybuilt houses of ex-British Army soldiers and their families. Locals said most of the roads had been constructed within the last three years-with a part of the money contributed by enlightened residents who have insisted on keeping the level of maintenance high. Indeed, spending the whole day driving around the greater Dharan area to see places of historical interests was a sheer pleasure, worthy enough to be captured for a car commercial.

But the good times seldom last. I had to return to Kathmandu to attend meetings at my head office in Sanepa, where the road, at least in the last three years, has deteriorated to the point that only all-terrain vehicles can ply on them. Parts of it, in fact, have been completely washed away, with nary a maintenance crew in sight since last monsoon.

This discomfort is all the more odd for this reason: on both sides of the road stand either a row of multimillion-rupee private houses with

cemented driveways and iron gates or the Nepal offices of various foreign aid agencies. With many wealthy Nepali and enlightened foreign residents around, you would think that they would have demanded better road conditions. Surprisingly, that does not appear to be the case. Though I use the Sanepa road as an example, its conditions mirror those that exist in many areas of Kathmandu. So, what is Dharan's secret? What does it have that Sanepa doesn't?

For answers, it helps to look at three public institutions and see how they do business with one another for the public good. One is the Sewerage Corporation, which also issues tap water. Municipalities make up the second group, while the Road Department is the third party. Their dysfunctional relationships-made all the worse by an apathetic civil society that is weak in its demand for better public services—is the cause for bad roads.

Historically, Kathmandu's drainage system along the residential areas was designed to collect storm water. In time, larger pipes were



haphazardly added to this system to collect sewage as well. But as the number of houses increased with permits issued by municipalities to generate easy revenue, that system came under a tremendous strain.

And one result has been that during rainy season, water collected in drainage pipes floods streets and, over time, washes away parts of it. As of today, neither the Sewerage Corporation nor the municipalities have bothered to set up a maintenance division. Frustrated by this, the Road Department sees little incentive to

spend money on routine maintenance.

Dharan seems to have found a way out of this sort of a spiralling mess. Led by citizens who demand better public services, Dharan has learnt not only the fine art of how to mobilise local resources to partially pay for an effective delivery of public services. It has also learnt how to achieve better coordination among those who design the drainage, make the road and blacktop the streets so that citizens can take pride in their streets. Can Kathmandu not learn from Dharan?





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chose Kuala Lumpur, Brunei and we also have another option. In return, Royal Nepal can operate out of Doha to any destination in the world. Normally, flights that come in have time schedules changed and new ones introduced. We decided on with the summer schedule and so did Royal Nepal. We were in the planning process and we decided at that point to operate our flights in April. It was a coincidence.

If Royal Nepal Airlines were to be privatised, would Qatar be interested in a stake? Not really.

What of future growth in the aviation sector?

At the moment flights are full because there are enough seats for those coming in. Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has to find new markets and encourage others to see Nepal as a profitable destination. If the market stagnates, new airlines won't fly here. So, if you want Singapore Airlines to return, NTB has to promote Nepal in the Far East because a new Chinese market is coming up. Other things can be done even at the airport. Most of the airlines pay a lot of money for ground handling so I think services at that end can be increased.

And what about Qatar's presence here?

As it is, I think 15 flights a week is a very big operation and as far as operations go, Kathmandu is one of the biggest stations in the entire network. Qatar is involved with NTB, but we want to work with them more, especially in Kuala Lumpur. We're taking local tour operators to Malaysia for promotions and doing the same for Nepal, opening a new segment. At the moment, we have traffic going from here to Kuala Lumpur but not the other way around. We see figures going up with each flight. We were a bit worried when the ceasefire broke off, but by that time we had already decided to increase. The management decided we'd go ahead, which really worked. Once we commit to a certain market we can't pull out, so our efforts to promote Nepal, even in Europe, are quite high.

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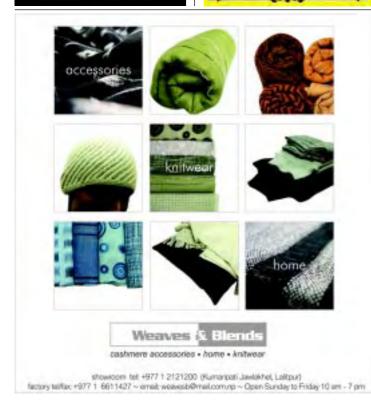




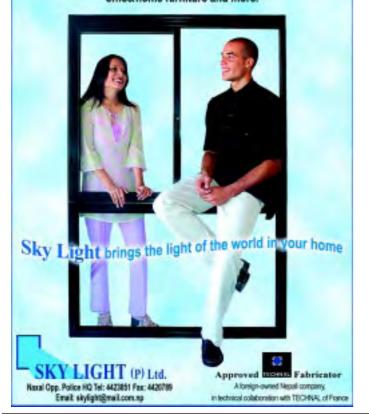


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medium of movies to support Nepali nationhood, unity and to bolster government programs. The job of the Panchayat government's Ministry of Information's was to popularise and strengthen the partyless polity and making Nepali films was conceived as one of the most effective ways to do it. So at the request of King Mahendra, Bollywood filmmaker Hira Singh Khatri came to Nepal and started work with the Department of Publicity Film Division and, for the first time, Nepalis saw a film made in their own country, Aama. "It was a great thrill to see a film with a Nepali story, Nepali actors and in our own language for the first time," recalls actor Gautam Ratna Tuladhar.

hen Nepali films

tried to use the

Nepalis craved for more films, but production was slow. It took the ministry and director Khatri another three years to produce a second film. Then came Paribartan, based on a drama by Janardhan Sama to popularise the Back to Village Campaign. Finally, it was with the production of Maiti Ghar that the development of Kollywood began.

But it has been a long, hard struggle. It took almost another 15 years to attract investment from the private sector to make Juni, produced by Sujata Films and directed by Jharendra Shamsher Rana.

The government's Royal Nepal Film Corporation made movies at an average of one every three years. Yet they played to capacity crowds. It was only in the mid-80s that Nepali filmmakers like Tulsi Ghimire, Shambhu Pradhan and Uddhab Paudyal finally started the Kollywood trend. Ashok Sharma also moved from acting to producing and directing. One of the leading directors of today, Yadab Kharel, also entered the scene along with stalwarts like Prakash Thapa, BS Thapa, Laxmi Nath Sharma and Prem Basnet. By 1999 Kollywood was



The Lux Film Awards on Saturday may be just the affirmation Kollywood needs to show that it is in a new phase of creativity and originality.

putting out more than 20 films annually and Nepali filmmakers were making history. Those who went into debt no longer worried because films now guaranteed a return on their investment. Cinema became not only a breadwinner but also a platform for recognition and fame. There was a time when actors worked for a month and were jobless the rest of the year. They were now so busy that they had difficulties giving dates for new projects. Even before one film was finished, they signed another. Kollywood made great strides technically, too. Filmmakers no longer had to go to India for recording, editing, processing and final production. Production gradually started taking the shape of an industry and also provided opportunities and created more jobs. Better studios meant songs

were recorded in Nepal. Companies like Prime and Cinematrix that saw potential in processing, dubbing and editing made huge investments that paid off.

Filmmakers like Tulsi Ghimire, Shambu Pradhan and Kishor Rana, who concentrated on Bollywood, turned their eyes homewards and made Kathmandu their work base. The Royal Nepal Film Corporation was privatised into the Nepal Film Development Corporation and by 2000, 32 films were being produced every year. In 2001, that figure

3 million, not even breaking even with the Rs 3.2 million invested in the film.

The financial side of the industry might frustrate Shah, but he is hopeful about a bright future for Kollywood. "Our film directors and producers have become more quality conscious and that is a positive symptom," he says.

Producers can no longer afford to act hastily and put out just any film. They should evolve from the stereotypical subjects of ill-fated love, macho heroes duelling evil villains, erotic 'item' dances and stale comedy routines. There is room for growth and the audience is tired of the same old themes. "There is strong need to give a new direction to Nepali cinema. We can no longer identify with a hero dying of tuberculosis and there is little use of a director who looks at life in such a unimaginative manner," explains Dipak Neupane, an avid Kollywood fan. Veteran actor Rabi Giri believes people and social perspectives change according to time and should be reflected in the movies. "If in one scene, there is a boy who dumps his girl after sex, the next scene will have her trying to commit suicide by throwing herself in the river or hanging herself. Should we be teaching today's generation that the loss of virginity is the loss of dignity? Should we be telling them that the only answer is to end one's life? Can't a girl go ahead with her life after that?" he asks. It is necessary to abandon the four-decade-old conservative mentality of script writers, directors and producers if



was 72.

Despite eight years of violence, killings and terror, film production has not ebbed. In fact, the number of films is growing. It seems escapism has its own market momentum. There are, however, challenges in expanding to the international audience. While films like Prem Pinda and Caravan earned a reputation outside Nepal, very few films meet international standards. "I couldn't afford it anymore. Our government's fiscal policies have to change," says Neer Shah, who believes that the government's anti-economic concept is a huge obstacle in the way of high budget quality films. And then, owners of movie theatres that are not certified deluxe are not allowed to decide ticket prices. "How can you get returns by

selling tickets for just Rs 28?" asks Shah. When his film was shown at the old Jai Nepal cinema, he was not allowed to increase the price of the ticket. "There are people willing to pay more for a quality product," adds Shah. His revenues from ticket sales came to around Rs





presents







Nepali films are to bloom.

It's not as if Kollywood has never displayed originality and innovation: just look at the work of directors Chiring Ritar, Navin Subba and Ravi Baral. It is possible for Nepali cinema to take on a new lustre with a new breed of bright and talented actors, technicians and producers. Today's filmmakers are already more critical of their products than in the past. Recognising mistakes and identifying room for improvement are the first steps to creating a better film. Efforts at breaking the mould, putting out a film worthy of the Nepali audience, should be

recognised and applauded. The first ever Lux Film Awards 2060 is just the kind of affirmation and support that Kollywood needs. It accords a kind of respect and sense of dignity that originates from the audience to all the artistes who make Kollywood what it is. "This kind of event is a real inspiration to us all," says actress Jal Shah. On Saturday, 29 November, when the crème-de-la-crème of Kollywood walk the red carpet to the awards, our stars will have the chance to shine just a little bit brighter in the future. 🔶

Actor in a leading role

1 Hari Bansha Acharya – Je Bho Ramrai Bho 2 Rajesh Hamal – Muktidaata 3 Shree Krishna Shrestha – Eh Mero Hajur 4 Shiva Shrestha – Mamaghar 5 Bhuwan KC – Babusaheb

Actress in a leading role

1 Gauri Malla – Sanyas 2 Bipana Thapa – Mitini 3 Niruta Singh – Lahana 4 Karishma Manandhar – Babusaheb 5 Jal Shah - Buhari

Actor in a supporting role 1 Dilip Rayamajhi – Mamaghar 2 Sushil Chetri – Dhan Sampati 3 Harihar Sharma – Babusaheb 4 Santosh Pant – Mitini 5 Madan Krishna Shrestha – Sukha Dukha

Actress in a supporting role

1 Rekha Thapa – Mitini 2 Gauri Malla – Mamaghar 3 Sushila Rayamajhi – Eh Mero Hajur 4 Melina Manandhar – Ke bho Lau na ni 5 Mithila Sharma – Sukha Dukha

Music director of the year

1 Maya Namara – Suresh Adhikari 2 Sukha Dukha – Shambhujit Baskota 3 Lahana – Sachin Singh 4 Biswaas – Shambhujit Baskota 5 Grahan – Shakti Ballav

Playback singer of the year

 Dhadkinchau – Udit Narayan Jha (Lahana)
Dhadkinchau – Sanjeevani (Lahana)
Timi lai bhani – Ram Krishna Dhakal (Je bho Ramrai Bho)
Chitko Saree – Sharmila Bardewa (Aankha Lobi Man Papi)
Samjhanale – Sunidhi Chauhan (Ziddi)

Actor/actress in a comic role

1 Deepak Raj Giri – Biswaas 2 Narayan Tripathi – Maya Namara 3 Jeetu Nepal – Pooja 4 Hari Bansha Acharya – Je Bho Ramrai Bho 5 Nitesh Raj Pant – Bhannai Sakina

Actor/actress in a negative role

1 Basundhara Bhusal – Afnopan 2 Sunil Thapa – Kranti 3 Mukunda Shrestha – Santaan ko Maya 4 Jimmi Gurung – Muktidaata 5 Sushil Pokhrel – Sukha Dukha

Director of the year



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0

Viplob Pratik is a poet and film critic.

2 Deepak Shrestha – Afnopan 3 Kishore Rana – Santaan ko Maya 4 Narayan Puri – Mamaghar 5 Ramesh Budhathoki – Babusaheb

Picture of the year

1 Sukha Dukha 2 Afnopan 3 Babusaheb 4 Buhari 5 Mamaghar

Screenplay of the year

1 Suraj Subba – Buhari 2 Om Pratik – Babusaheb 3 Haribansha Acharya – Je Bho Ramrai Bho 4 Abhinash Shrestha – Biswaas 5 Shiva Regmi – Eh Mero Hajur



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US aid for ADS

fter extensive deal making, Congress is set to provide \$2.4 billion for global anti-AIDS initiatives in 2004, \$400 million more than was requested by President George W Bush. The money, part of a \$17.1 billion foreign aid package that is being folded into a nearly \$400 billion fiscal year (FY) 2004 spending bill, also includes \$550 million for the Global Fund to Fight HIV/ AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria—\$350 million more than Bush asked for.

Anti-AIDS activists say they are encouraged by the increases, although they also stressed the totals still fell far short of what is needed to combat the epidemic which, according to estimates from UNAIDS released Monday, will have taken three million lives in 2003, nearly 80 percent of them in sub-Saharan Africa. "This is a clear indication that the Republicans in Congress have broken with the president's policy," said Paul Zeitz, executive director of the Global AIDS Alliance.

The foreign-aid package also includes one billion dollars to set up the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), a controversial initiative announced by Bush some 18 months ago that would increase aid to poor countries that pursue economic and governance policies favoured by the administration. The MCA is controversial primarily because most of the world's poorest countries cannot satisfy the basic criteria for eligibility and because it sets up a new bureaucracy apart from the Agency for International Development (USAID), which has built up expertise in poverty-reduction programs.

The total appropriations bill, which covers everything from highway projects to food labelling, comes to \$373 billion and must still be approved by both houses of Congress, either when they return from Thanksgiving recess 8 December or, if that proves impossible, after the Christmas vacation in January. While the overall bill's fate still remains uncertain due to complaints from Democrats and some Republicans about specific provisions, virtually all of the concerns involve domestic programs; the deal struck over the foreign aid package is likely to survive whenever the bill is finally passed.

The \$17.1 billion for aid represents a six percent increase over spending for FY 2003, which actually ended 30 September. But the total comes to less than the \$20 billion in reconstruction and other aid for Iraq and Afghanistan that was approved by Congress in an emergency appropriation earlier this month and to less than four percent of the \$460 billion Congress has approved for next year's Pentagon budget.

Of the \$17.1 billion, moreover, \$3 billion are earmarked for Israel, whose per capita income far exceeds the vast majority of developing countries. Another \$3 billion will go But it comes with strings attached.



to three other countries: Egypt, Jordan and Colombia. Nearly one billion dollars is to be spent on international anti-drug operations. About \$731 million of that total will be devoted to fighting drug trafficking in the Andes.

For development assistance, the package includes \$1.8 billion for child survival and health initiatives (\$516.5 million of which are wrapped into the global AIDS section), \$185 million for other infectious diseases, \$330 million for maternal and child health and \$375 million for bilateral family planning programs. A total of \$1.4 billion is allocated to other kinds of bilateral development aid, including education initiatives, but some of that money will also go to the MCA.

In addition, \$913 million will go to the soft-loan facility of the World Bank, the International Development Association and \$95 million to the restructuring of bilateral debt held by poor recipients. Slightly more than \$1 billion will be allocated for international disaster, migration and refugee assistance, while \$321 million are assigned to international organisations, with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) getting the largest share—\$120 million.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is supposed to receive \$34 million, the same amount that Congress appropriated for it in FY 2002 but was withheld by the Bush administration on the grounds that UNFPA's support for China's population program violated a 20-year-old law that bans aid to any organisation that supports or participates in coercive abortions or sterilisations. The administration's position on UNFPA represented a novel and controversial interpretation of the so-called Kemp-Kasten amendment. Previous administrations, including Republican ones, merely subtracted the aid spent by UNFPA in China from its total annual contribution. (*IPS*)



DECEMBER





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OPINION

28 NOVEMBER - 4 DECEMBER 2003 NEPALI TIMES #172

by SATYABRATA RAI CHOWDHURI



The world's largest functioning anarchy

ecently, India's Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said that despite the outward appearance of health, Indian democracy appears to have become hollow, with elections reduced to a farce and the "party system eroded due to unethical practices." According to Vajpayee, "The outer shell of democracy is, no doubt, intact, but appears to be moth-eaten from inside." Indeed, in the preface to a recent collection of his speeches, Vajpayee wondered whether democracy had truly taken root in India.

This is a strange turn, for parliamentary democracy has long been a source of pride for most Indians. They have always been able to boast of the vitality of their parliamentary system. Nowadays, such boasts are heard far less frequently.

Not only are India's economic failures more obvious, so too, are the failures of its political system. Unprincipled politics, cults of violence, communal rage and macabre killings of religious minorities have all combined to shake people's faith in the political system's viability. Small wonder, then, that people are starting to ask whether India needs an alternative system of government.

Part of the problem lies in India's deracinated party politics. Rather than ushering in an era of recognisable multiparty politics, Indian democracy still lacks a party system worthy of the name. One reason for this is that there are barely any national parties. Instead, India is saddled with highly volatile leader-based



groups. Lacking coherent principles or an overriding ideology, these groups fragment when their leadership changes or splits, as the Congress did.

Where parties are weak, there can be no party discipline. The prizes conferred on opportunistic defectors not only undermine the party system, but weaken the foundations of parliament by making organised opposition impossible.

Public apathy bordering on fatalism is the inevitable result. This is dangerous because apathy does not take the form of withdrawal from public



life, but increasingly finds expression in sectarian and religious conflict. Of course, politicians incite many of these conflicts, using caste, sect and religionnot political ideas—to build voter loyalty. But apathy about democracy is what makes so many ordinary Indians prey to poisonous appeals.

This susceptibility is the clearest sign that India's experiment with the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy has failed to justify the hopes that prevailed fifty years ago when the constitution was proclaimed. Back then, parliament was seen as a means to bridge the divides of caste, religion and region. Parliament's increasing irrelevance in sorting out these problems-indeed, its role in exacerbating them-is fueling a growing preference among Indians for a presidential system of government that removes executive functions from the oversight of an institution that has been addled and rendered impotent by undisciplined factions.

Sadly, Indian society never really embraced the consensual values that India's Constitution proclaims: a participatory, decentralised democracy, an egalitarian society with minimal social and economic disparities, a secularised polity, the supremacy of the rule of law, a federal structure ensuring partial autonomy to

If what India has is democracy, then it is not delivering.

provinces, cultural and religious pluralism, harmony between rural and urban areas and an efficient, honest state administration at both the national and local level.

Instead, race and caste remain as potent as ever. Wealth is as grossly distributed as ever. Corruption rules many state governments and national ministries. Urban and rural areas subvert each other. But parliaments demand a minimal national consensus if they are to function, for they are creatures of compromise in decision-making. Executive governments, on the other hand, are creatures of decision: a popularly elected president is ultimately responsible to his voters, not to his party colleagues.

The very election by national suffrage of an executive provides the type of minimal consensus that India's faction-riven parliaments have, sadly, never been able to cultivate. A president will undoubtedly need to compromise with his legislature, but the general consent that is gained by popular election implies at least some broader agreement behind the platform that he or she campaigned on.

Of course, no magic bullet will do away with the forces that divide India. But at least some of the maladies of the current parliamentary system, such as defection, party factionalism, inherent political instability and crippling coalition politics can be minimised, if not eliminated, by adopting an executive-dominant model of presidential democracy. In adopting such a system, Indians would have nothing to lose but the corruption and chaos of today's discredited parliament. (© Project Syndicate)

> Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri is a Research Coordinator at the Stockholm International Peace Institute.

Shrinking aid pie

OKYO - Cuts and a heavy focus on Iraq's reconstruction in Japan's aid oudget, also the country's most important diplomatic tool, is a clear signal of a strategy that puts national interests over poverty eradication

Japan plans to reduce its official development assistance budget for iscal year 2004, which starts in April, by 5.8 percent from the previous year, according to the foreign ministry. This would be the fifth year eflecting a consecutive decline in overseas assistance. Japan's aid oudget was almost \$9 billion in the last fiscal year. A key component of the upcoming aid budget is a hefty grant program for war-torn Iraq, \$1.5 pillion for 2004, pledged by the Japanese government in Madrid in October. The package represents by far the biggest offer from nternational donors. The European Union pledged \$260 million, a step hat critics here say indicate pressure on Japan to support its closest ally. the United States. This focus on security and affiliation with controversia US foreign policy also means lesser attention on more developmentoriented aid, which would have been more in keeping with changes in aid policy before the 11 September attacks. (IPS)

Japanese stand

VASHINGTON – North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons and its admission last year that it had abducted scores of Japanese citizens over he past two decades has driven even cautious Japanese diplomats to ake positions further to the right of the Bush administration. At a recent Washington seminar on Korea, Naoyuki Agawa, the minister for public affairs and director of the Japan Information and Culture Centre at the Embassy of Japan, publicly endorsed the concept of "regime change" in "ultimately the solution" for the nuclear cris



Korean peninsula.

This comes just before a December conference between the US, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan, all of whom want Pyongyang to stop making weapons, and North Korea, which is seeking guarantees of security and economic aid in exchange for any promise to disarm. Meanwhile, the Bush administration is split between a hard-line faction centred at the Pentagon, which prefers a regime change and a more pragmatic faction at the State Department, which sees no choice but to negotiate. US President George W Bush, in a recent visit to Asia, made it clear that he supports the latter course. (IPS)

Reaping famine

HAKA - Streams of people are heading for Sylhet, Moulavibazar, Comilla and Chittagong in search of work because of a looming famine in northern Bangladesh. There was no winter paddy crop and for an estimated seven million people, the seasonal lack of food has turned into near-famine conditions. Newspaper reports have said that at least 24 people died of diseases brought on by starvation conditions during September and October. Yet Abdullah al Noman, the minister for food in Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government, has claimed that the 'monga'-the local term for the acute shortage of food at this time of year-was "not grim" in the northern districts and that no one has died of starvation. However, despite al Noman calling the situation "not grim", the government has launched emergency relief operations in those very districts. Unfortunately, the relief distribution effort has overlooked some of the worst-affected areas. A Parliamentary Standing Committee has stated that the situation has been made even more grave than it was because of the government's failure to control crime syndicates which collect money from trucks carrying food supplies to the stricken districts. (IPS)





FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

Students in crossfire



Nepal Samacharpatra, 24 November

नेपाल संमाचारपत्र

As if the clashes between security forces and Maoist rebels were not enough, the indefinite education called by a Maoist student wing in 12 mid-western districts of Nepal has affected 400,000 students. Pre-SLC exams are also affected. The strike is called by All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary) who have demanded the release of their leaders who, they claim, were abducted by the security forces

Helpless in this tug of war between the rebels and the government, many

students have already left for the tarai and other urban areas. Guardians and parents who have not been able to send their children to safer areas are concerned about their educational future. Caught between gun-totting rebels and the helplessness of the security forces, students and their parents have every reason to feel hopeless about the future. What worsens their fear is the kind of bombing that took place in the district education office in Banke last Sunday. Other Maoist-declared protest programs like hoisting black flags in educational institutions, conducting 'people's action', closing

schools, organising shutdown strikes in transport and industrial sectors are yet to come.

People in the mid-western region these days are sure only about their insecurity: "Only god knows what will happen next," they say. As a result of a flare-up in the violence, schools in Surkhet district have already closed. The shutdown strike in educational institutions may serve the interests of the organisers but they are grossly indifferent to the future of the students. When strikes affect thousands of students, the organisers not only fail to attain their goals but they will lose what support they had.

This is not the first time students are being used for the vested interests of a political party. In the past, almost all parties resorted to this mean to meet their objectives. They must stop this selfishness. They must understand that meddling with students' present means snatching away their future. This also robs the nation of its future.

These are the same parties that never tire of raising slogans about nationalism and the people's welfare. When it comes to action, they do just the opposite. This hypocrisy must end.



Karnali's plight

Space Time, 26 November रपेसटाइम दैनिक

There is no government in any of the five districts of Karnali zone. Besides the army and security forces, other government agencies are nowhere to be seen in Humla, Jumla, Kalikot, Mugu or Dolpa. "The lack of government units has made it easy for the Maoists to increase their activities and terrorise the locals," says UML's Dilli Bahadur Mahat, who just returned from a tour of Karnali. All the police chiefs, CDOs and security personnel leave their offices and take refuge at the army barracks before dusk. "The CDO and police chief stay at the barracks all night and return to their office only in the morning," says Mahat.

Maoists have destroyed all the suspension bridges at Kalikot, Humla and Mugu. The government, meanwhile, has stopped supplies of medicines, food and other necessities from district headquarters for fear of Maoist looting. "Famine is gradually spreading in the villages," says UML member Chandra Bahadur Shahi from Mugu. The rebels have disrupted road maintenance in Jumla-Surkhet, Hilsa-Simikot and have also closed down schools. When the UML group met local Maoists and reminded them of the Maoist leaders' commitment not to attack infrastructure, they got this reply: "We are not taking any orders from anywhere, we will do whatever we like in our area."

Foreign hand

Dhruba Hari Adhikary in Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 November

तेपाल संगोचारपञ

Normally, a big country would like to see a stable environment in its smaller neighbours because peace in the neighbourhood allows it to focus on economic and development activities. India appears to be doing just the opposite in Nepal. It has pitted Nepali political

forces one against the other, provided safe refuge to an armed rebel group and has indirectly instigated the killing campaign in

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Nepal. It has also resorted to propaganda that Nepal has become a playground of the United States, China and Pakistan. It was the same country that beat us to declaring the Maoists as terrorists. And ever since then, they have harped on about solving the Maoist problem through dialogue. These contradictions indicate that India does not want stability in Nepal, making Nepalis increasingly suspicious about true Indian intentions.

Risktakers

Drishti, 25 November – 1 December ្រូវដែរ

RUKUM-Bhagirath Khatri wanted his son to have a better education so he sent him to Khalanga, the district headquarters so his son could study in a safer environment. The Maoists considered that a crime. They detained and tortured him for days before forcing him into hard labour on their farm. Now he also has to work as their porter. The Maoists have threatened to kill him if he does not bring his son back soon. In Pipal village at Rukum, locals are no longer free to do anything without the permission of the Maoist commanders. They need a written permission letter from the Maoists to visit Khalanga and return to the village. On the other hand, they need gate passes from security forces to enter the district headquarters. Families who don't support the rebels are forced to leave and abandon their property. They end up displaced and homeless at district headquarters.

Maoist flags now flutter above village houses that have been commandeered for Maoist offices. Most locals now prefer to send their children away and face the Maoist wrath. Almost half the youth have left for Dang or Indian cities to study or work.

No entry

Rajdhani, 26 November राजधानी

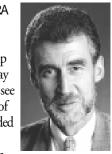
A good month after the government decided to ban citizens from entering Singha Darbar, the members of the cabinet are in no mood to reverse the decision. Even after security officials assured them

that the common people posed no threat to the central administration secretariat, the ministers want the ban to continue. "Why allow people to enter?" is what Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, Information Minister Kamal Thapa and other ministers allegedly asked security officials. "If we allow the general public in, there will be more disturbances." The official said the concerned agency tried to assure the cabinet that they were capable of maintaining security in the Singha Darbar complex.

Lemp's stand

Rajdhani, 27 November राजधानी

DADELDHURA -German Ambassador Rüdiger Lemp was on his way to Dhami to see the progress of German-funded development projects when



local Maoists stopped his car. The Maoists talked to him for a while and told him that they were political activists and requested him to not to label them terrorists. In reply, Lemp told them not to destroy the country's infrastructure and to stop the killing and violence. He also told them not to obstruct rural development projects.

Double jeopardy

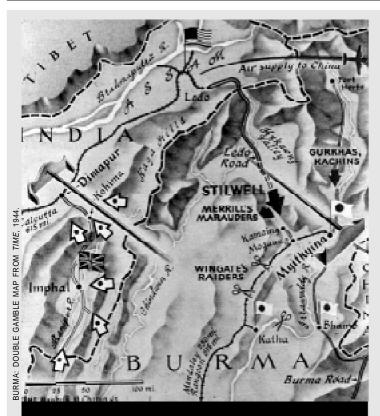
Rajdhani, 26 November

राजधानी Tilak Sapkota of Kubinde at Sindhupalchok has been victimised both by the state and Maoists. Two years ago, he lost his shop to a Maoist arson attack after being accused of being pro-government. Now the army has arrested him for being a rebel informer. For the last 36 days Sapkota, whose health has deteriorated, has been detained at the barracks. "We are preyed on from all sides. What is our crime?" asks his son Rajendra. The only mistake Sapkota made was receiving a phone call from a local Maoist leader. His father has been targeted despite most of his relatives being in the army or police. His daughter's father-in-law is a major in the army, but even that didn't help Sapkota.

1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 भाषा प п 00 00 0 00 П First house: Nepali Congress Second house: RPP Seat: PM Drishti, 25 November –1 December QUOTE OF THE WEEK "Is Surya Bahadur Thapa a partyless prime minister?"

– Pashupati SJB Rana in *BBC Nepali*, 24 November

HISTORY AND CULTURE



A month and a half after Man Bahadur Rai (right) and the rest of the retreating Gurkhas left Burma they reach Nagpur in India. They are delighted with fresh rations, new uniforms and their

first bath since they began their march. Rai estimates that nearly 10 Gurkha battalions have been wiped out. His story is part of *Lahurey ko Katha,* a collection of memoirs based on oral testimonies of 13 retired Gurkha soldiers, translated from Nepali by Dev Bahadur Thapa.

Back on the Burma front

e descended three or four miles down the Indian border when we saw the road leading to Manipur. We could see a caravan of human beings and mules below. A group of British soldiers were on the march with their belongings laden on the animals. When we finally arrived in Manipur we had to beg for food as the government had made no arrangements for rations. We somehow managed to procure food from one place or the other in the village. Some did not wait for the rice to cook and ate it raw. This led to another problem: diarrhoea. I, for one, escaped it.

A gate had been put up at the 105-mile post where highranking officers such as colonels and captains conducted verifications. As soldiers poured in, they checked identification cards to make sure no one with false papers came inside. They let in those who had genuine ID cards and threw out those who did not have them, even though they were army personnel.

All sorts of people came there: Gurkhas, Indians and scores of others. In Burma, there were Bahun, Chhetri, Rai and Limbu villages and so women and children were also in the camp, although they were put aside. On arrival, everyone was given two meagre handfuls of ration. There was no shelter even for the troops. Those who died there were buried in shallow holes and covered with sal leaves. The smell was unbearable and we feared the possibility of a cholera epidemic.

As the troops arrived, people fled, leaving behind cows, buffaloes and goats. It's likely that our forerunners had done some looting. Quite a few of the troops, on the pretext of killing stags, killed buffaloes for meat. The buffalo meat caused dysentery. We went down to Dimapur in groups and then after that to Nagpur. There we finally felt a regimental atmosphere. We were provided with government scale rations. They provided us one uniform jacket, clothes, books and so on. There was a small stream and since we were issued soap we decided to bathe before we wore our new uniforms. Afterwards, there was a layer of lice in the water because after our departure from Burma we had no chance to bathe or wash our clothes. It had taken a monthand-a-half to get here.

There were approximately 1,000 troops at Nagpur at the time of our arrival. The number was only 375 as we approached the gate but once we got in, the personnel from other units were also taken in and our numbers swelled. All the hardships we had undergone became a matter of the past. Everything including mugs, towels and plates were all new. We were given a full mug of tea each. A song blared from the loudspeakers and each of us was given a packet of biscuits that was eaten with relish.

We spent about 15 days there. Since no tents were provided for, we had to sleep under the sal tree. All of a sudden we were shifted from Nagpur to Hoshiyarpur in Punjab where we were posted for three years. Survivors from the Burma war came in waves of sometimes 15, once 100. From 12 battalions we were barely enough to raise two. I have no idea how many people perished in the Burma front. From the Gurkhas alone, my estimate comes to the equivalent of 10 battalions.

After another three-year training we were once again sent to Burma. En route we came to know that the Japanese had taken prisoner 1,400 of our troops. Meanwhile, the Americans had broken through and some of our old comrades were among those who escaped. When they came out they were beyond recognition even though some of them were in the same company as us in the past. Food, including meat, was taken from Dumdum airport in Calcutta and air dropped to the troops. Some of it was intact but others were damaged when the packages broke during landing.



Japanese planes were a menace, the paradropping had to be done on the sly.

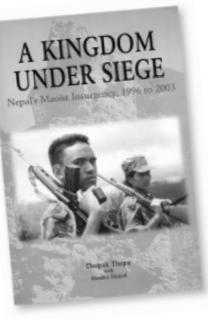
Once we broke through the lines, we started marauding the Japanese. Yet in a sense we refrained ourselves from killing. We cleared the jungle of those hiding inside and finally reached Burma. We cleared Burma of all these infiltrators and then retreated. Clean sweeping of the Japanese would not have materalised. A significant thing happened in the meantime. King Hirohito of Japan, in view of the destruction caused by the dropping of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in order to check further killing, broadcast their surrender. We heard about it later. We also heard that the top ranking Japanese officers including generals and colonels had committed suicide. (Concluding *chapter next fortnight.*)

BOOK REVIEW

ust a few years ago, there was a time when uttering the word 'Maoist' at a gathering of Kathmandu's Englishspeaking elite would raise concerned eyebrows and usher in a moment of awkward silence. For many residents of the urban centre, this period was marked by fear of the unknown and incomprehension of the insurgency that was sweeping rural Nepal. The accomplished journalist and editor Deepak Thapa, together with a handful of notable others, can be credited with changing that. In 2003, continuing to fill what was fast becoming a niche market, Thapa edited a collection of writings (most of which had been previously published) of wide-ranging perspectives on the Maoist insurrection, aptly titled Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal. The present book, A Kingdom Under Siege, was published during the second ceasefire in the eight-year old conflict (in the first half of 2003), and is Thapa's latest contribution to the growing body of literature which surveys the state of the movement and its historical origins. In this volume, with input from Bandita Sijapati, Thapa describes the Nepali state's neglect of many of its citizens, the instabilities of the polity and the rise of radical left politics in the mid-western region of Nepal, which quickly emerged as the Maoist heartland. Given all that has transpired since the most recent talks collapsed, Thapa may well be thinking

about a sequel.

Chapter One contains a short set of sobering anecdotes about individual lives affected by the insurgency and Chapter Seven addresses the state of play during the second ceasefire, and offers some concluding thoughts. In between, a long Under siege Everything you wanted to know about Nepal's Maoist insurgency. So far.



may contribute to the unfortunate misconception that rural villagers are ignorant of radical ideology and less than full political agents. human life. The presentation is cogent and the analysis carefully-worded, with such thoughtful asides as: "In a country where illiteracy, lack of proper health services and poverty are rampant, there is a strong debate about whether weapons will necessarily provide the country with

by MARK TURI

second chapter takes the reader on a tour of the history of modern Nepal, from the formation of the nation-state in 1768-69 to the first indications of Maoist insurrection in western Nepal in 1996. While the history is solid and undoubtedly of utility to readers wanting a potted account in under 40 pages, at times it plods along with an over-reliance on dates, names and facts that are not immediately relevant. The overview is useful, however, and well referenced to a set of primary texts and resources in the end notes for those interested in further reading.

The next chapter, Understanding the Causes of the 'People's War', is by far the strongest in the book and makes for engaging reading. Thapa is at his best when providing prudent commentary on facts rather than presenting only facts themselves, and he starts in the right vein by noting that most of the Maoist demands are "reasonable and not dissimilar in spirit to the election manifestos of mainstream parties" (*page 53*). This chapter may also be read as a damning indictment on central government planning and the

development industry, noting as it does that poverty outpaces growth and lamenting the "economic dualism" (*page 60*) of the urban-rural split in Nepal. While Thapa's critique is hardhitting and addresses the feelings of marginalisation and frustration among Nepal's half-educated rural youth, his suggestion that "much of the Maoist appeal lies not in the resonance of Marxist theory among poor and often illiterate villagers" (*page 64*) is questionable and

Chapter Four addresses the growth of the Maoist movement since 1996. Thapa deals in turn with the government's initial chaotic response, the little-known but fascinating Dhami report, Kilo Sierra Two and the political and military actions of the police, Maoists and army. The following chapter, Two Momentous Years of 2001 and 2002, includes the Palace Massacre of June 2001, the emergence of "overground" Maoists and the hope for peace negotiations. The authors have chosen to box salient events, such as the Dang and Salleri attacks (Box 9, page 122) and the Arghakhanchi rout of September 2002 (Box 10, page 130). The effect is convincing and allows readers to pause momentarily on a single incident and reflect on its significance.

Chapter Six assesses the cost of the conflict to date, in both human and economic terms. The data are grave: profound contractions of GDP during the last years of the conflict, massive insurance claims, widespread destruction of infrastructure and a terrible loss of security" (*page 148*).

The lack of polemic which characterises Thapa's journalistic style is genuinely refreshing and deserves special mention. The book's greatest shortfall is the regrettable lack of analysis, an absence which is all the more noticeable since, when the author does engage critically with the subject matter, his insights are always sharp and pertinent. The conclusion is a case in point: while no one could disagree with the suggestion that the only way to bring about a lasting peace is to build a state that is equally attentive to the interests of Nepal's diverse population groups, readers will have to wait for Thapa's next instalment for a compelling vision of how to get there.

> A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003 Deepak Thapa with Bandita Sijapati The Printhouse, Kathmandu pp xv + 234, Rs 350

ISBN 99933 59 07 6

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



CITY

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- Traditions in Transition: Jewellery making in the Kathmandu Valley designed by Eric Wiele and Indigo Galleries exhibition and sale of Antique textiles from Laos, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and furniture from the hills of Nepal and more. 11AM onwards, 29 November at Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
- Living Culture by Krishna Gopal Ranjit till 30 November at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. Daily except $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$ Monday, 11AM-6PM
- $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$ Sofa so good Paintings by Kripa Joshi at Dhokaima Café at Patan Dhoka. 5543017
- Offerings, Generosity & Devotion in Daily Life Impressionist Photography by Sandy Shum,
- Himalayan Mandala Photographs by Paula Wenzl and Joseph Bellacera till 10 December at Siddhartha ٠ Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048

EVENTS

- The God's Dance of Kathmandu Valley 7PM on Tuesdays. Tea+Ticket: Rs 400 at Hotel Vajra.
- Cine-Club: Canon le barbare 30 November. 2PM at Auditorium Molière at Alliance Francaise, Thapathali. $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$ 4241163
- Lux Film Awards on 29 November at BICC, Kathmandu. NTV live telecast 4.45 PM. *
- Project Peace in the Streets of Thamel Music, dancing, food and drinks 2-10PM on 29 November, Thamel. * Open to all.
- Summit Hotel's Xmas Night Market. Followed by Summit's Famous Friday BBQ. 12 December 3-9PM. $\dot{\mathbf{x}}$ Free entry. 5521810
- ٠ Wild Earth Holiday Open House handcrafted herbal products, unique and precious gifts, 4.30 PM Slideshow: 'Returning Benefit Back to Source: The impact of Tibetan medicine's growing popularity on medicinal plants & women of the Himalayas'. 6PM Slideshow: 'A Return to the Elemental: A Sensual History of Spas'. 2-7PM Sunday, Shivagiri, Tangal. 4436040, 4438883.
- AWON Annual Xmas Bazar for great shopping, wonderful food. Tickets: Rs 50. 10AM–4PM, 6 December at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4438830, 4425069

MUSIC

- Lucky Ali Live in Kathmandu also featuring Deepak Bajracharya 2PM on 6 December at Dasharath Rangasala Ticket: Rs 200. 6PM on 7 December at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Ticket: Rs 2,999 per person (dinner and drinks). Tickets available at Gemini Grocery, Hot Breads, Alina's Bakery Café, Suwal Music and Station Pub.
- Abhaya & The Steam Injuns every Friday at Fusion, Dwarika's. 4479488

DRINK

- 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

- * Bring your wine along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- Sunday Brunch at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 11AM to 3PM. 5543017 $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$
- Momos & More the finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692 *
- Bhaktapur Night BBQ dinner in the Shambala Garden every Friday. Rs 600 per person * (welcome drink and dinner). 4412999
- Roadhouse Café for speciality coffees. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755 $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$
- Authentic Chinese food at Tian Rui Chinese Restaurant, Thapathali. 4243078 \diamond
- \diamond 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 $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$
- Traditional Newari Thali at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632 \diamond
- Weekend Ban Bhoj at the Godavari Village Resort. Reservation recommended. 5560675. $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$
- Homestyle cooking by Japanese chef at Dan Ran Japanese Restaurant, Jawalakhel. 5521027 ٠
- Vegetarian specialities at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4480262

GETAWAYS

- $\dot{\mathbf{x}}$ 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
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28 NOVEMBER - 4 DECEMBER 2003 NEPALI TIMES #172

BOOKWORM



Nepal: Political Parties and Parliament Lok Raj Baral (ed) Adroit Publishers, 2003



The universally accepted symbiotic relationship between parties and parliament in the old (British) model does not address the overarching problems of a country like Nepal, advances the contributors to this volume. They expound that the contextualisation of multiparty democracy has thus become the new agenda of today's social scientists and politicians.

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

Grab your tissues, Karan Johar is back with all his legion. His mission is to make *Kal Ho Naa Ho* the biggest tearjerker of 2003. Directed by Nikhil Advani, scripted and produced by Karan Johar, the film has music by Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy and lyrics by Javed Akhtar. The script trudges the tried and tested path for yesteryear's hit *Anand*, but with the second table and the second table. but with the contemporary look. Set in a New York neighbourhood, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* takes a look at the life of the Kapurs, a half-Punjabi, half-Catholic family. Naina Catherine Kapur (Priety Zinta) shoulders the responsibility of her family which includes her mother Jennifer Kapur (Jaya Bachchan) and great grandmother. Enter Aman Mathur (Shah Rukh Khan), an incorrigible optimist even in the face of his ailment, who decides to make a few changes in Naina's life. To accomplish this task, he ropes in his friend Dr Rohit (Saif Ali Khan). Weighing heavily on its emotional quotient, Kal Ho Naa Ho is guaranteed to get your popcorn soggy.



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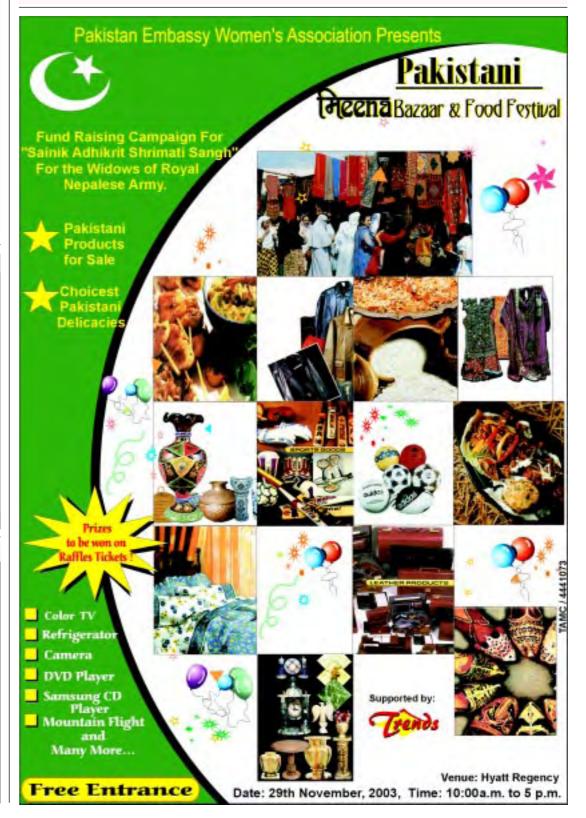
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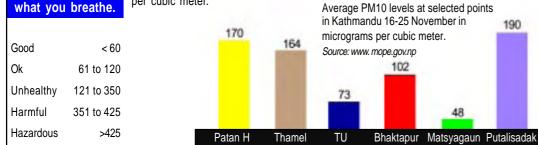
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the valley floor. Once again last week, the PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) levels in urban areas such as Putali Sadak, Patan Hospital and Thamel were higher than previous weeks and above the national standard of 120 micrograms per cubic meter throughout the week. Even in Bhaktapur Durbar Square, where there are no vehicles, the average PM10 was higher than the 100 micrograms What you burn is per cubic meter. Average PM10 levels at selected points



by MAUSAM BEED



November is the driest month in the valley with average precipitation for Kathmandu at 8mm. This year it is even drier: there has been no rain at all the whole month. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows nothing in the offing. The frontal system that is bringing rain over Afghanistan, when it arrives here over the weekend, will have little moisture left. A huge high pressure area stretches over central and northern India and this will ensure more sunny days with cooler nights. Minimum temperatures will plummet further by one degree Celsius.

KATHMANDU VALLEY







ATING MY WORDS

by BHATMARA BHAI

NE NE

The offal truth

Your favourite fortnightly food fadist takes a walk on the Newari wild side.



R eal Newars don't eat quiche. They eat lungs. And stomach lining. And brains. And a lot of other animal body parts that I couldn't place. This week, in an eternal quest for culinary truth, Bhatmara Bhai went for a walk on the Newari wild side.

For the tourist, Newari cuisine comes in elaborate and vastly overpriced packages, often with a heavy dose of "folkloric" dance. A range of cultural experiences is on offer: some dances include a heavy pinch of the Old Baneswor Dance Restaurant School, others are reasonably authentic. Some are just bizarre. Let's take, for example, the young chap who careers around restaurants in a very convincing ornate peacock costume. Very convincing, until your eyes meet the white Nikes poking out the bottom of the costume.

I digress. This is a food column. Much of the food served at upper end Newari restaurants is of a high standard and is rather yummy. But while the offerings are Newari in origin, they have been heavily shangrilised for the tourist palate. I like these restaurants, but genuine article they don't offer. Wunjala Moskova, next to the Police headquarters, my favourite, gets three Bhatmara stars. The cultural show is unobtrusive and entertaining (Nikes notwithstanding). The food and service are excellent and good value. The ambience is superb.

So where do the Newari roots of this touristy razzmatazz hide? Bhatmara sniffed out a small piece of the roots at Harati, a popular *bhatti* discreetly tucked away in Naya Bazar, off the north end of Thamel. At Harati, the arrangement between owner and customer is simple. People, mostly men, come here to eat, drink and argue. The owner provides chairs and tables. And there ends the decor. There are no dances on offer, no peacock with fashion issues here. Food is what the crowds come here for, and food is what they get.

There is no English menu, so you are going to have to drag along a Nepali chum. The menu is, however, an astoundingly long, long, long list. Mostly of offal. Not quite literally nose to tail, but not far from the truth. You have to like offal if you go to Harati, because there is little else on offer.

Offal is not simple to cook. Brains, lung and marrow are delicate and complex. Finnicky preparation destroys their qualities and Harati plays to their strengths. Their preparation of most offal dishes is very simple. The fried bone marrow, stuffed lungs and tongue were particularly nice. Some of the other 'bits' were, to my mind, tough: their texture definitely an acquired taste.

It is best to abandon concessions to any idea of health when coming here. Many of the dishes are greasy. But is 'greasy' necessarily bad? If a full English breakfast or a plate of steaming pork on sauerkraut (or anything from Holland, nation-ofdeep-fried-food) brings a smile to your tongue, you should not hesitate to try authentic Newari fare. The link to health and food is naught but an unpleasant fad, after all. And a few beers or a Khukuri Rum or six will transport you to a better place, a time when personkind's primordial love affair with the flavour-carrying quality of fat was a matter for celebration.

A few vegetarian dishes are also available at Harati and they are simple, unpretentious and pleasing. Most impressively, the restaurant offers seasonal dishes. Bhatmara approves. Big time.

Harati is in some ways a temple for joyful celebration of one rich sampling of Nepal's cultural diversity. Many of the tastes and textures are very unfamiliar to the outsider, but do yourself a favour, try it. You only live once. Food is life. \blacklozenge

> Bhatmara Bhai now has email: bhatmarabhai@yahoo.com



Ludmilla's lebensmittelpunkte

orld traveller Ludmilla Tuting has two centres in her life: Berlin and Kathmandu. She gropes for an English word to describe this state, gives up and says: "These are my *lebensmittelpunkte.*" How Kathmandu came to be one of the two middle points of Ludmilla's life was a simple encounter on a lonely road near Bhairawa in

1972. She had just crossed over from India and her bus had a flat tyre.

"We had to wait an hour besides the yellow mustard fields and below a deep blue sky while they fixed the wheel, and I talked to some women who were carrying water in brass pots on their heads," Ludmilla recalls. "I can't remember what they said, but it seemed to me so friendly, so peaceful and so unaggressive. I was smitten by this land."

She was 27 then, and the young environmentalist and

writer was travelling the world to learn about the planet and its peoples. After the chaos and the overcrowded cities of India, Nepal was a haven. Thamel had only two hotels and some small restaurants. The road to the airport in Baneswor was still rice terraces, the air was clean and the mountains were clear.

"For all of us when we crossed from India, Nepal was such a big difference," she observes. "Unfortunately, with the insurgency, pollution and corruption the difference is getting less and less." Ludmilla, a supporter of the German Green Party, started spending half the year in Kathmandu and half the year in Germany. She went on to write more than 12 books about Nepal, including *Bikas Binas*, which looked at eco-tourism and the links between sustainable development and the environment in 1984—long before it was fashionable to do so.

Her biggest inspiration was the founder of the Indian Chipko Movement, Sundarlal Bahuguna, whom she met in 1982 during his Trans-Himalayan



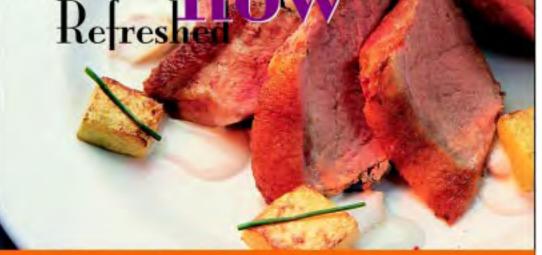
march. "Whatever I am now, my commitment to humanity, ecology or human rights and the need for humility, everything I learnt from the people in the Himalayan region, mainly Nepal," says Ludmilla.

As a freelance writer, Ludmilla today advises travellers on real conditions in a world plagued with terrorism and violence through the Tourism Watch website (www.tourismwatch.de). She tries to give a more nuanced picture of Nepal than alarmist and discouraging information provided by foreign

embassies. "People need to be informed about the places they are travelling to and have a realistic assessment of the dangers," she says. "In Nepal, for example, it is important to make a distinction between maobadis and khaobadis, and like everywhere else you have to be careful. The news you get in Europe or on the Internet sound more frightening than it actually is."

Ludmilla is just back from a study tour of Dolakha and she is happy to see, despite Maoist activity and 'donation' drives, there are quite a few trekkers on the Rolwaling trail. And it is up there in the mountains of Nepal that she suddenly realises how happy she is: "I envy myself everyday for the life I have." •





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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Oh FAQ!

or the first time in recent history, the number of unique online visitors to the

official His Majesty's Non-Government of Nepal website (www.hmg.non-gov.np) has exceeded the actual number of hardcopy visitors to Nepal. It is a matter of pride and an indicator of the rapid strides we have taken in information technology that more foreign investors made virtual visits to the kingdom than physical ones in the last fiscal year.

However, since no website is complete without a click for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), our homepage also needs a one-stop window containing answers to everything potential investors want to know about Nepal but are afraid to ask because they think they are stupid questions. So as a service to venture capitalists we present a list of the most stupid frequently asked questions with our equally asinine answers:

Where is Nepal? 1.

Good question. We're just trying to figure that out ourselves. In a philosophical sense you could say that we don't know where we are at the present time, and which way we are headed. Anyone who finds Nepal, please return it to its rightful owners.

2. What is Nepal known for?

For the birthplace of Lord Buddha. For the in-laws of Lord Ram. For lapsi, timur and gundruk. For the world's highest mountain. For the world's deepest gorge. For the world's fastest clock. For the world's tallest dwarf. For the world's most trustworthy crooks. 3. What kind of world records do Nepalis hold? Climbing Mt Everest 12 times.

- Fastest ascent of Mt Everest by a human being.
- The person who has become prime minister most
- number of times in world history. The highest per capita producer of instant
- noodles on the planet.
- What is the most common form of greeting 4 in Nepal?
- "Khanu bho?" Translation: Have you partaken of your kickback for today?
- What are some basic customs I should 5. know about Nepal before deciding to invest there?
- Do as Nepalis do: never offer anything with your left hand.
- If it is under the table, taking with either hand is OK.
- Take your shoes off when you enter a house.
- If you notice that the occupants have stopped breathing, take your socks off as well.
- Always pay at least five times what locals pay for all forms of transport within Nepal.
- Nepalis are naturally friendly, so don't make them unnaturally unfriendly by refusing to pay the compulsory Rs 15,000 revolutionary tax in Taplejung.
- Despite his outward appearance, the Great Asiatic One-horned Rhinoceros is a shy and thinskinned animal, always ask for his permission before taking a photograph.
- Public display of affection is considered offensive, so refrain from holding hands in public unless you are of the same sex.
- Nepalis have a great sense of humour, in case you hadn't noticed.

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