

NEPALI Times

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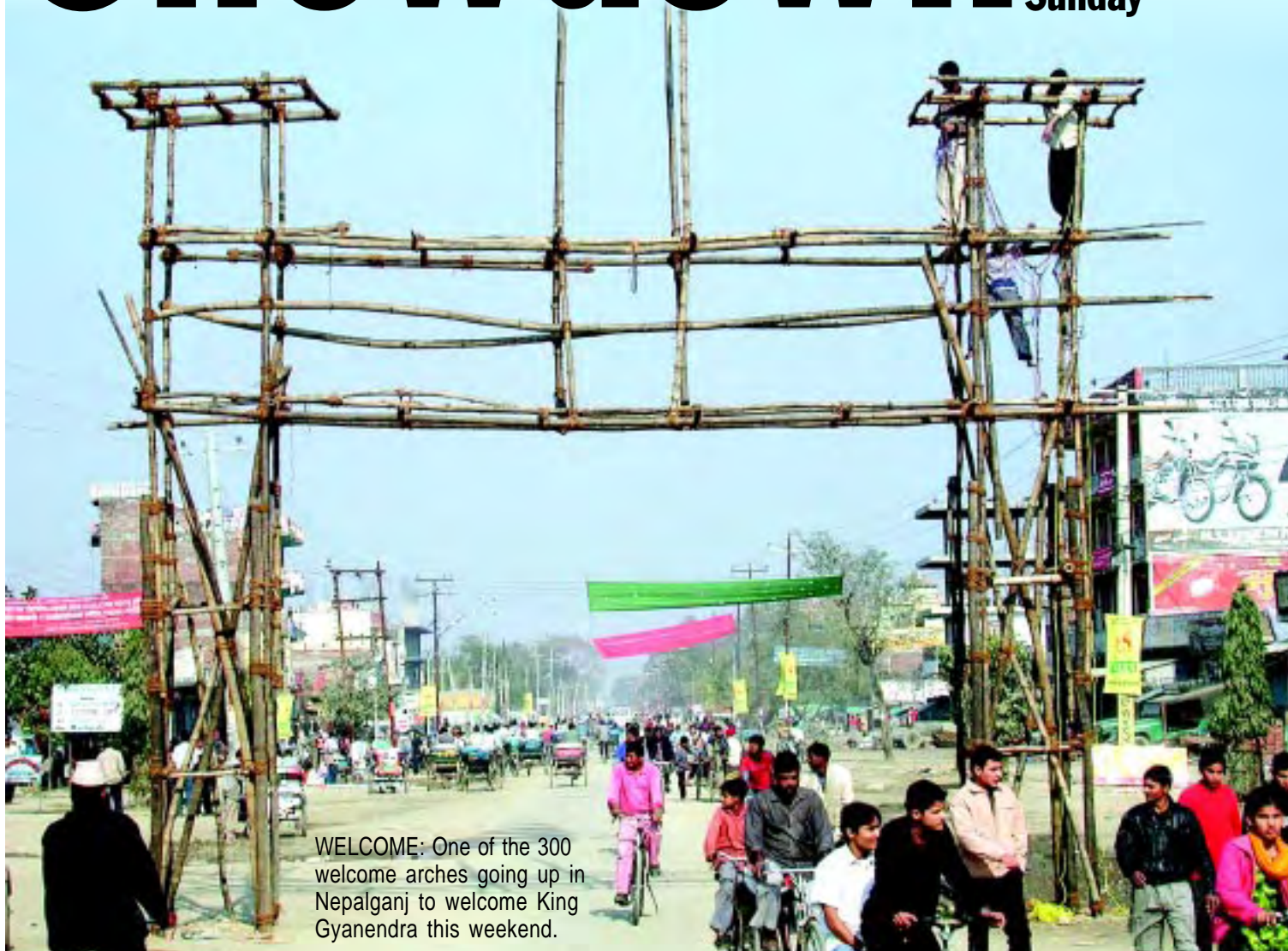
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Showdown

King Gyanendra defies Maoist threats to travel to Nepalganj on Sunday



WELCOME: One of the 300 welcome arches going up in Nepalganj to welcome King Gyanendra this weekend.

RUDRA KHADGA

NETRA KC in NEPALGANJ

King Gyanendra is a public felicitation ceremony in Nepalganj on Sunday at a time when student-led protests in support of republicanism are intensifying across the country.

More than 300 welcome arches have been put up along the seven kilometre stretch of road from the airport to the stadium where the king will be honoured. Potholes have been hastily plugged and roads widened.

But the mood in Nepalganj is subdued. The Maoist-affiliated Tharuwan Liberation Front has

announced a three-day bandh starting Friday in four districts adjoining districts. Violence has risen: two policemen were killed in explosions this week and 30 security personnel were injured on the Mahendra Highway Wednesday. Security has been stepped up, with choppers hovering overhead. "Watch us, you will see from tomorrow how tight security will be," Regional Administrator, Rabindra Man Joshi told us. At joint meetings to coordinate security and preparations, the main worry is the low turnout. This is the third official felicitation ceremony for King Gyanendra since he ascended the

throne in June 2001, and is part of the tradition for a new king. The first two ceremonies were held in Biratnagar and Dhangadi last year.

For locals, this is a time to lie low. "We have learnt not to expect much from these official visits," said a local, Prem Bahadur Malla.

Local NGOs, businesses, offices have been mobilised. VDCs and DDCs in the outlying areas, including districts in the Maoist affected areas have set up preparatory committees to arrange for people to travel to Nepalganj.

The local leaders of the political parties say they will boycott the royal event. Krishna Man Shrestha of the

Nepali Congress said: "We have not received any decision from the central committee, but we are not going to participate." The UML's Deb Raj Bhar said the felicitation ceremony was "quite meaningless", adding: "It is very bad timing. All this expense at a time when the country is in crisis." Student unions affiliated to the parties are planning a protest program on the same day.

Not everyone is so negative. Purna Lal Chuke, a Nepalganj-based political analyst said: "This is a Maoist-affected region, and maybe when the king comes here he will find out for himself how bad things are and help us." ●

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Diagnosing Nepal

The life expectancy in Kathmandu is 30 years more than in Mugu

MEDIA TYPHOONS

At a time when the country is suffering from multiple crises, we didn't need the distraction of yet another street fight, one that pits rival media houses in a knockout tournament. The losers are Nepali readers who have come to expect much more professionalism than was displayed on the front pages of the national broadsheets this last week.

We can analyse the dispute on several levels. The first is content: the coverage of this media war was itself an indication of how easily media owners dumped journalistic ethics and independence to employ their column inches shamelessly for a partisan cause. The separation of news and opinion went out the window: inflammatory headlines, provocative intros, incendiary pictures and text was no different than the role of the arsonists on the streets. Contrast this with the way the BBC covered the aftermath of the Hutton Report this week that saw the resignation of its director. And let's not hear any of those 'we are Third World so we can be third rate' excuses.

Essentially, this is a circulation war gone crazy. One side took the irresponsible step of piggybacking on an ongoing political student unrest to hurt its rival by igniting jingoism and pseudo-nationalism. Better examples of shooting oneself in the foot are hard to come by, even in this day and age.

So far, we have been fortunate that the unrest did not spread like a bush fire across Nepal's tinder-dry polity. Even without the experience of the Hrithik Roshan riots, such tactics would have been termed rash. But knowing what happened then, it was a decision of incredible recklessness.

Having said that, one can have a rational debate about the pros and cons of foreign direct investment in media. Some countries have no problems with it, others feel they need restrictions. But it is clear that in an age of economic globalisation and satellite media, the days of national control are numbered.

One can argue that since television's transboundary footprint puts it beyond national regulation, at least print media should be protected from foreign ownership. Fair enough. But that is for our law makers to decide, not mobs in patriotic frenzy over an outdated wire service news item on Lumbini.

Even so, are we so weak and vulnerable that we feel threatened by a couple of foreign owned newspapers? Canada has taken on and beat the next-door US media juggernaut—not by shutting it out, but by being better and more relevant. The way to beat foreign ownership is to be more professional, more credible and more independent.



I have been coming to Nepal annually for the last decade in an attempt to improve surgical services in remote district hospitals. This gives me snapshots to make comparisons and the most significant one last month was the

GUEST COLUMN
Stephen Bezruchka



construction boom in Kathmandu.

As a medical doctor and a student of population health, I am amazed at how many under-employed doctors there are in Kathmandu, as well as how many brand-new under-utilised disease palaces there are that together tempt the well to become sick. Medical schools and various colleges of so-called health sciences abound to produce even more resources to treat the worried well.

There are few practitioners in Nepal who minister to the sick, but instead there are surgeons who cut, physicians who diagnose, endoscopists who look around, urologists who probe and

neurosurgeons who suck out brain jelly. The construction boom in hospitals, nursing homes and research centres ensures that medical harm will become a leading cause of death in Nepal, as is the case in developed countries.

The most troubling discovery is how little discussion there is about the conflict here, or any consideration of what to do about it. I found lots of published works on the Maoist conflict, especially documenting its history. Even Baburam Bhattarai's PhD thesis is available. But there is precious little on potential solutions.

Yes, everyone wants peace. But how are we going to get there? No one even has a clue about how to start. Many see the need for a republic, which locally means Nepal no longer having a monarchy, and having some semblance of democracy. Others want a benevolent despot to rule them. Some fear the army is in control of the non-Maoist part of the country.

There are signs and stickers advocating peace. Maybe they want the exploitation that existed before the troubles began to continue peacefully. If you don't know where your ship is going then any port you end up in is fine. Only the students are marching, but they have no answers either. They just want change. Politics here is almost a dirty word, suggesting only partisan discussions.

Nepal's burgeoning media are weapons of mass distraction, as they cater to prurient youth in a society that is considerably more salacious than a decade ago. Bent on creating a consumer society, with a service-oriented culture,

the media offer no choices for a healthy society.

So what kinds of solutions might be considered? To begin with, the massive concentration of royal wealth is not conducive to justice. When three of the most luxurious cars in the world are purchased with public funds, what kind of message does that send to Nepalis?

Then perhaps an emergency needs to be declared to provide basic needs as enunciated by King Birendra decades ago. The focus of such programs have to be in Mugu, Bajura and Kalikot, the three least-healthy districts. The average length of life in Kathmandu is 30 years more than in remote Mugu.

Nepal can take cues from Kerala state in India or Sri Lanka and pursue an social-welfare led development program. Those have been incredibly successful in producing a healthy society, despite a protracted civil war in Sri Lanka. Both countries have a health status close to America's.

Discussions on peace must begin with vibrant discussion of the primordial problem: increasing relative poverty, the astronomical gap between rich and poor and what to do about that. Nepal had peace from 1951 to 1996, but that wasn't enough. The guiding principle, should be John Rawl's Theory of Justice in which inequalities are limited to those which benefit the least advantaged. Begin by canceling the royal order for Rolls Royces and Jaguars. ●

Stephen Bezruchka worked in Nepal between 1976 and 1986. He is now senior lecturer in the International Health Program of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle.

LETTERS

KING AND COUNTRY

King Gyanendra's handling of the nation's state of affairs suggests that he has no desire to rule the nation for long. As CK Lal opines in 'A king can't do wrong' (State of the State, #181), the moves by the royal palace after he assumed the throne is slowly and gradually pushing the future of monarchy towards an inevitable downfall. Had our political leaders been good enough, the people would have already revolted and reinstated their sovereignty. King Gyanendra has tried to capitalise on their stupidity, but the people are not foolish. Ultimately, it looks like it will be the monarchy that will pay the price for the king's actions. It would be in the king's and the national interest to hand over power to political parties and force the Maoists to join mainstream politics.

Rameshwar Kafle, email

- As usual, CK Lal in his 'A king can't do wrong' (#181) reveals the true state of the state. As the head of the family

holds the responsibility of looking after the family even forsaking his personal luxuries, the king must understand his own responsibilities and limitations. At a time when the country is in economic doldrums, there is no point in seeking Rs 142 million from an almost bankrupt exchequer to buy more cars. When will the king start looking at the plight of the famine-stricken in western Nepal?

Ashish Sigdel, Bharatpur

- After reading the king's interview in *Time*, I was quite impressed and even dared to hope for a better future. But something did not seem right. The king has consistently spoken about his concerns for the Nepali people but why has there been absolutely nothing to show for it? CK Lal in 'A king can't do wrong' (#181) made me understand why. I agree with Lal that it was not right for the king to hike the palace allowances and import the luxury cars at the present time. Perhaps these purchases could be acceptable if the palace coffers were also being engaged in charity, development and

relief work. All this does is strengthen the hand of those who think that extreme measures will solve our country's deep-rooted problems.

R Khadga, Lazimpat

- It has been almost a year-and-a-half since the political parties launched their anti-king demonstrations. Having started to destroy the nation in the past 12 years, they now want to finish the job. The Royal Nepali Army and the CIAA should teach the leaders of political parties a good lesson before it's too late. The Panchayati system used to be a lot better than the democracy we have now. Democracy is only for the politicians but not for the public. Students, the 'pillars of the future', are just pawns of the narrow-minded political leaders. Nepalis should

stick together and build a new nation. If the situation stays like this, we will be vulnerable to external intervention. The king should take power in his hands and help all of us to live safely. As things stand, that acronym for Nepal—Never Ending Peace And Love—doesn't stand a chance.

Buddhi Pant, email



KIRAN PANDAY

Free competition and free press don't always complement each other

No one should be surprised about how both sides in the raging media war have activated their Dirty Tricks Depts. Bribing officials or hiring hoodlums to control the market is standard operating procedure in nascent capitalism. Cutthroat price wars come with the turf. Maligning

the competition is accepted practice.

So, when *The Himalayan Times* (THT) and *The Kathmandu Post* (TKP) got into a mutually destructive competition to undercut each other on the newsstands two weeks ago, all we could do was hope that better sense would prevail. Alas,

instead of improving content to earn reader loyalty, the mortal combat got nastier.

And when the anti-THT broadsheet cartel, Nepal Media Society, dragged out a decayed debate about the birthplace of Buddha into unnecessary controversy, it simply exposed the intellectual bankruptcy of our media moguls. When you stoop so low, you lick the dirt. The jingoism escalated and the two sides burnt copies of each other's papers on the streets.

A mob pelted stones on APCA House on 29 January, hurting one reporter. Mob fury is unpredictable. Had the attack on THT claimed innocent lives, it would have been impossible to exonerate the Nepal Media Society. The media cartel couldn't have chosen a worse time to resolve its longstanding rivalry with *The Himalayan Times*. The country is in crisis: the insurgency is into its eighth bloody year, the monarchists are in no mood to relent, mainstream parties are agitating, students are raising republican slogans. All we need is internecine warfare in the media to complete the picture of total chaos.

Kailash Sirohiya, Jamim Shah, Mahendra Sherchan and Pushkar Lal Shrestha must know they are playing with fire. They are all too well-informed to claim innocence if their jingoism had turned into a repeat of the media-instigated madness over Rhitik Roshan's non-remarks.

What spooked these media heavyweights at this point in time? The rumor in town is that Nepali media bosses are having sleepless nights worrying about more Indian private media competition over the horizon. Several regional conglomerates are said to be eyeing the Nepali

media market, lured by advertising growth potential.

Sahara India, with interests in aviation, trading and finance, is believed to be contemplating a grand entry into Nepali media mainly to safeguard its future business interests here. The fate of the FM and terrestrial television of the Kantipur Group, satellite telecast of Spacetime and print ventures of Kamana

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



publications would be in double jeopardy if corporate India made a dramatic entry.

Merchants prefer not to incite violence: instability is never in the interest of business. So, perhaps Nepal's media moguls know something the rest of us don't. Otherwise, why dig up an obscure two-month-old story that had died a natural death?

The current controversy has also raked up another issue: can one media house be trusted with the control of print, radio, television and the Internet? The Kantipur Group's coverage of the present controversy shows exactly why such monopoly is dangerous. The same vitriolic coverage of its rival media comes out of its FM, television, print and Internet outlets. In normal times, Kantipur would have made a spectacle of itself by doing all this. But at the time of multiple crises in the country, a media monopoly, in cohort with a cartel that it dominates, could unleash unimaginable disaster. This is where the regulatory role of government should be visible. But it isn't.

The issue of foreign investment in the Nepali media needs to be resolved once and for all. If we can do without it, let's legislate against their entry into our holy country. Television would be forced to take up the Nepal One model of uplinking from India, the print shibboleths will be saved from the competition and degenerate into a series of *Rising Nepals*. We have seen free competition and free press aren't complementary. The media can't be guided by market fundamentalism in a country like ours. ●



OJHA

I would like to applaud Suresh Ojha's initiative ('Silicon Valley to Kathmandu Valley', #180). Only a handful of Nepalis return to Nepal with such a mission. Ojha's optimism amidst the grim situation that hinders visionaries like him is admirable. After reading his article, it sounds like Ojha has just started getting firsthand experience dealing with Nepal's bureaucracy that tends to work against those who plan to help the nation. Nepal always had great engineers. What Nepal lacks are business experts who can compete in a challenging global IT market and export IT services of significant scale and quality.

P Thapa, Maryland, US

NOT YELLOW

Yubraj Ghimire's research-type article 'King's ADC or Singhal's pawn?' (#180) is right on. Ghimire bares to us readers the truth that Nepal is moving backwards in every field.

The actions of the king, the behaviour of the parties, and even the so called 'People's War' of the Maoists are no help. In this race

of backwardness, some 'Durbarians' are fanning religious extremism. It is not smart for a 21st century king's image to be seen using religion for legitimacy. And it is especially not smart to use Indian religious extremism to shore up support. Fundamentalists have no place in modern Nepali society. This is a nation for all Nepalis, not for 'Durbarians'.

Ashok Neupane, email

MONKEYING AROUND

I find it an outrage that the country that worships the Hanuman is even considering exporting monkeys ('Year of the monkeys', #180) for medical research in the west. It is



probably the best indication about how far we will go to sell our souls for money and profit. Greed has got the better of our society, it has replaced our traditional spirituality, compassion and respect for fellow living beings. If your reporter's investigation is right, then a whole food chain of officials, academics and overseas laboratories will profit from the export of Nepali monkeys to America. The man behind this plan, Mukesh Chalise, is quoted in your paper as saying "Common species should be used for human welfare. There is no harm in exporting monkeys." That kind of reasoning is precisely why this trade is so morally unconscionable. That we allow a fellow primate, one revered by our culture, to be tortured and used as a guinea pig in medical experiments that will end in a slow and painful death.

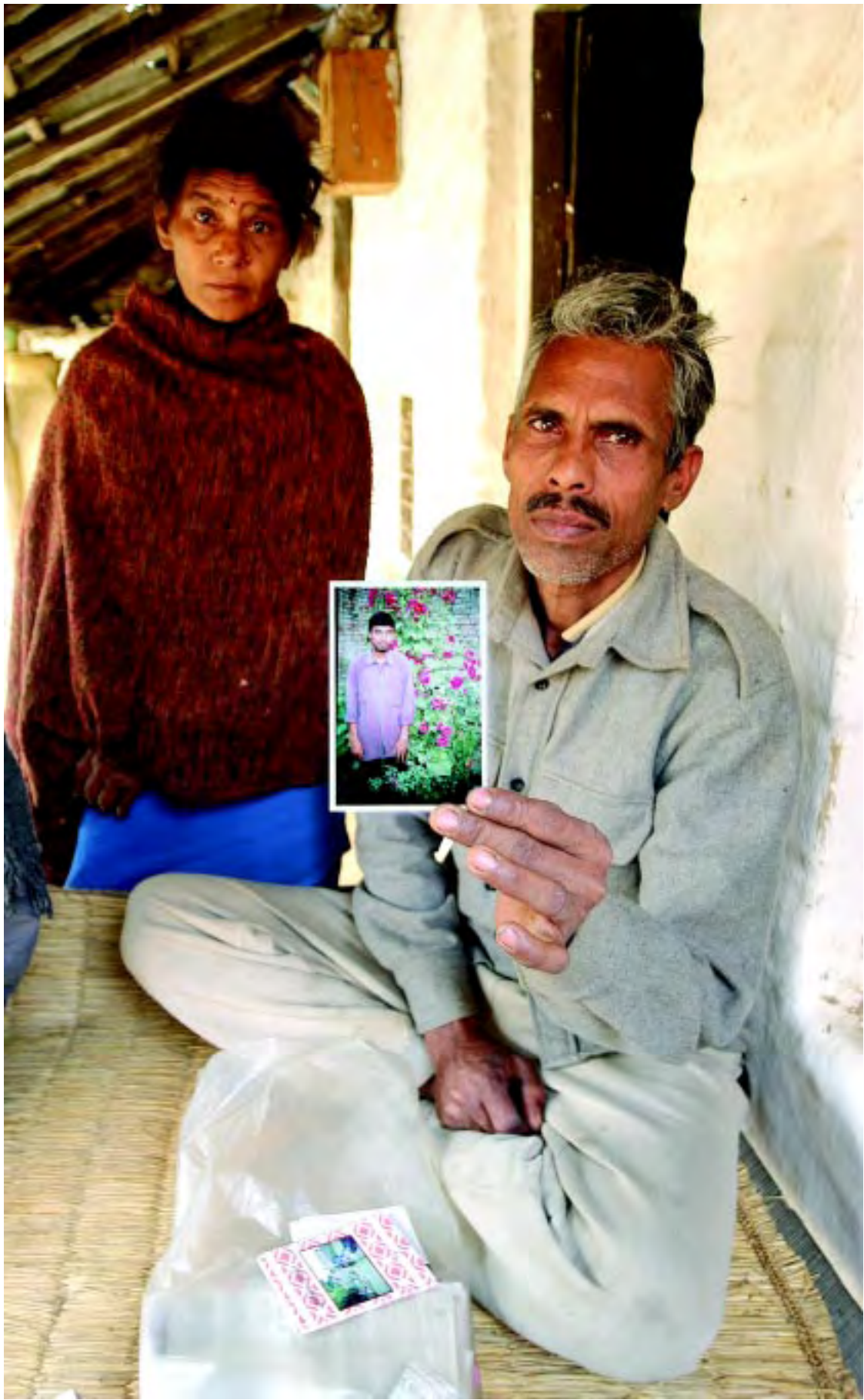
Mina KC, email

BORED

It has befallen upon this humble reader to give Kunda Dixit an executive criticism of his latest Under My Hat 'The Return of the King'

on behalf of all the eager beaver readers. This is to spare him the trouble of having to sit through another torturous evening tearing out his hair in exasperation trying to write something readable. So, without further ado, let us join Dixit as he sits through unappeasably horrible films about hobbits and elves, wizards and Dark Lords, because obviously he is not doing it for his own pleasure as he considers it his duty to watch the rotten movie and pass comments in his precious column. Are you still with me? Right, so Dixit watches the movie even though he himself is bored to death, and then goes through the horror of writing about it, because of course, we're never going to watch the movie without his comments. Then he tries to draw a weak parallel between the movie and the country. Anyone can plagiarise and poke fun, but talent and originality like director Peter Jackson's, who brings Tolkien back to life after half a century, is rare. Even if Dixit doesn't like this stuff, he should respect it.

Sewa Bhattarai, email



ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

Tale of two towns in the tarai

The Tharu struggle to survive war, impunity and neglect

NARESH NEWAR in BARDIYA

Satariya and Sohanpur in the fertile plains of the Karnali in Bardiya district are just a few kms apart. Villagers in both places have suffered and lost relatives in the conflict. In Satariya, the indigenous Tharu community is generally supportive of the Maoists, while in Sohanpur they aren't.

Driving into Satariya, the local guide gets nervous. "This is Maoist territory, it is risky, please be careful with your questions," he warns as we reach the quiet, isolated village. Two hours drive west of Nepalganj, many families here have willingly sent their children to join the Maoists. No coercion, no forced recruitment.

Because of this, Satariya has suffered retribution from the security forces and many Tharus have disappeared. No one suspected of being a Maoist ever returns after being taken in for questioning around here. Bardiya has the highest number of disappeareds in Nepal.

Parents gather around us with photographs, some with just negatives, of their missing sons and

daughters. They plead with us to help them trace lost relatives. "All we want is to know if they are dead or alive," says 50-year-old Dil Maya Tharu. A feeble looking old man nearby has waited two years in vain for his son to come home after security forces picked him up from his radio repair shop at Motipur. "If my son is dead, I just want to see his body so I can cremate him, we will be satisfied with the truth," he says.

A teenager, looking cold and indifferent, stands out in the crowd. He gestures that he wishes to speak privately. Entering a nearby house he latches the door. He is silent for a minute, then says: "People here support the Maoists but we have to be careful because there may be informers," says Buddhi Tharu. The 17-year-old lost his sister, two years older than him. "She was unarmed when they arrested her. Yet the next day, Radio Nepal announced that she was carrying a gun." It's been a year since the family saw her. Buddhi believes she is dead. "If she died,

Lak leaving

Parting shots from our columnist before he relocates

It's sad to leave a place after nearly four years. Sadder still, things are so gloomy, hope so distant. It's frightening that this country has yet to figure out how it wants to be governed. My own firmly held conviction is that most Nepalis would like what they were promised after the Jana Andolan in 1990—democracy, democracy and more democracy. But increasingly, they're lapsing into sullen silence about the choices on offer, and who can blame them.

It's simply not true that democracy has failed here. The mutterings of those who prospered under the old Panchayat system

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



are hollow and unhelpful.

And it's been clear for months now that there can be no return to authoritarian monarchy. The country is worse off than it was before 4 October 2002. The king's recent interview to *Time* magazine just added to the air of gloom. The monarchy is in real trouble in Nepal, and those in favour of the institution must do more than hold

public felicitation ceremonies and ban republican student meetings.

Those who agitate on the streets against the monarchy aren't exactly harbingers of hope either. Is it really enough just to chant slogans, fight with the police and organise discussions about republicanism? No, it's not. A republican state is a tricky thing. Moving from one form of government to another takes patience, compromise and a clear sense of where one is going. There must be a plan that has the overwhelming support of the people whose lives and certainties you wish to change. That isn't the case right now.

Another reason for gloom is the unforgivable behaviour of most mainstream media outlets at the moment. Happily, this newspaper and its sister publications are excluded. The agitation against *The Himalayan Times* and *Annapurna Post* is a risky game that can backfire against those who play it. If the two newspapers are indeed in breach of

the law, they should be prosecuted. But this is up to the courts, not the publishers of rival papers, who risk trampling on hard won press freedoms because they're worried about losing money in a circulation battle. Shame on you all.

The Maoists also depress me. They have little new to say and only repeat old nostrums that haven't captured the popular imagination in the past. They have influence, even control, over large areas of the countryside but they seem more concerned with petty authority there than with demonstrating their ability to govern fairly or ably.

Last and least, our dire development sector. Nepal's two most influential donors, Britain and America, now do more to support civil war than stop it. Others are content to let projects stutter or stop completely while writing ever more convoluted and pointless reports. Hats off at least to the European Union for threatening to pull out if things don't improve here



soon. The best we can hope for is generational change. The young people of today are going to do a better job, I just know it. Never trust anyone over 30. ●

Daniel Lak is moving to Miami, Florida and will be writing for the *Nepali Times* from America.



From I-r: Father showing a picture of his disappeared son, heavy security checks along the Bardia highway, Tharu villagers in Sohanpur anticipating a crackdown by security forces anytime soon. Liberated Kamaiba Shelter.



then she is a martyr who sacrificed her life for a good cause," he adds.

Buddhi is confident the Maoists will win the war. "If they can achieve so much in just eight years, imagine the impact of the revolution in another 20," he says. Several members of his family are either sympathisers or active members of the Maoist party. His uncle was recently shot by security forces while at a Maoist cultural program. Two cousin sisters who joined the Maoists as militants have also disappeared. The family is not sure whether they are still alive.

Buddhi's family and other Tharus here were easy recruits for the Maoists. The formerly landless villagers are now in charge and own big tracts of farms redistributed equally among the most impoverished families. "The jaimindars don't even dare look into our eyes," says Buddhi. "They used to own the whole village and gave us only a small share of the crop that we cultivated."

The landlords have abandoned their farms and now live in Nepalganj. Most have no savings left. The Tharus who are still loyal to their zamindar masters are threatened by the Maoists not to visit them or give them a share of the harvests.

Fear, not support

Down the highway in Sohanpur it is a different story. Here, the Tharus don't want to be associated with the Maoists at all. The death of so many of their people has been too heavy a price for the community. Despite the arrests and disappearance of at least six people in their village at the hands of the army, they do not support the rebels.

But this doesn't mean they support the security forces either. They fear them more than the rebels because the army patrols arrest innocent villagers and accuse them of being Maoists. "When the soldiers come here, they make a list of Maoists based on information given by our own people. There is no Maoist in our village," says 22-year-old Ram Prasad Tharu, whose father was disappeared by the security forces. "He was a simple hardworking farmer and not into politics at all." His family went to the Chisapani Army Barracks, but was told his father wasn't there. They never found him.

Tharus in this village still own their land and most of the youth go to school and colleges and help their parents on the farms. "All we

want is peace and to be left alone," says 23-year-old Rosan Chaudhary who, along with other young Tharus, runs a community forestry user group that helps generate income for the villagers from the forest products.

"We don't need this war. We have no expectations from the Maoists," says Rosan, who doesn't believe that the Maoists are really fighting for the Tharu. "The government can do a lot by bringing education and development programs so our young people get an education and will not be lured by the Maoists," adds Rosan. "We are no longer naïve, we know what is good for us." Despite the disappearance of his father, he has no intention of supporting the rebels.

The army now seems to be learning its lesson and doesn't treat every Tharu as a potential Maoist. Ekaraj Tharu, a radio journalist who broadcasts an educational program in Banke, has been motivating his community to go to school. Not a single Tharu has a government job here and he thinks only education will change things. "We have never been treated equally," he says. "And now we are in the frontlines facing the bullets and dying like dogs."

**“No Maoist or politician
did anything for us.”**



The Tharu kamaiyas were supposed to have been liberated from bonded labour five years ago. They have no desire to join the Maoists, but the kamaiyas are fed up of the frequent harassment by soldiers at the Liberated Kamaiya Camps in Bardiya, Kailali and Dang.

"We freed ourselves, no Maoist or politician ever did anything for us," says Devi B Tharu, chairman of the Freed Kamaiya Management Committee in Shantinagar along the Bardiya highway. He runs a slate-making factory to support his family. "I no longer have to worry what time to wake up and I can go anywhere I please," says Devi of his family's newfound freedom.

But not all kamaiyas are as fortunate. The land they were granted by the government is not enough to grow food on. Many kamaiyas say that they were better off working for their landlords. "I had no problem working under my jamindar. There is more hardship, but today we don't even have enough to eat," says Lahani Tharu, a 25-year-old ex-kamaiya whose jamindar was forced to let her go because of government penalties.

Two years ago, Sita Tharu's husband was dragged away by the security forces who accused him of being a Maoist. He never came back and Sita is looking after her five children by herself. Sita says freedom has made her community more vulnerable to harassment by the Maoists and the army.

"I'd rather not have my freedom," she says. "Who will help me to bring up my children, feed and educate them?" Her 15-year-old daughter is now forced to go back to working as a kamaiya to feed her mother and siblings. She sends them money and clothes from her landlord's house.

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Hand Graphics

“Sign the human rights accord”

Amnesty International’s two-member team has just visited four districts to look at the human rights situation. One of the members, Elizabeth Rowsell, shared her field experiences with *Nepali Times*.

Nepali Times: How bad is it?

Elizabeth Rowsell: This time we went to Nuwakot, Kabhre, Sarlahi and Dhanusha to investigate reports of extra judicial killings, disappearances and abuse by the Maoists. We found substantive evidence of alleged extra judicial killings by the security forces too. We are extremely concerned, that on the face of the evidence, a policy of the army to kill suspected Maoists seems to be emerging.

But aren’t the Maoists also doing it?

Yes. We investigated reports of killings by the Maoists, including one GTZ worker in Dailekh, reportedly because she was an informant and another woman because she had a brother in the army. The Maoists still appear to be targeting civilians and non-combatants and indulging in human rights violations such as extortion, abductions and executions.

Which side is more guilty?

We don’t make comparisons, it’s not about who commits more human rights violations. The situation

is extremely grave in Nepal. It is almost certain to become a catastrophe unless the international community, the government, civil authority and others take action now. We urge both sides of this conflict to sign the human rights accord.

What if the army refuses?

The international community has to urge the government to sign the human rights accord as soon as possible, even unilaterally. There have been over 200 disappearances in the country since the end of the ceasefire in August 2003. But when families go to the Supreme Court to try and lodge habeas corpus petitions, the authorities deny arrest. Instructions must be issued about the rules of engagement. Shooting people dead who are suspected to be Maoists and not first arresting and charging them with recognisable crimes must be stopped immediately. Security forces must behave in line with the constitution of Nepal and ultimately with all the international standards to which Nepal is a state party.



KIRAN PANDAY

To sign or not to sign?

Signing the Human Rights Accord would be good PR for the government

KUNDA DIXIT

With hopes receding for an early ceasefire, pressure is building up for the government to at least sign a draft accord on human rights so that more innocent lives are not lost and the conflict is conducted according to international humanitarian norms.

Nepal’s international donors, human rights organisations and domestic civil society are lobbying hard to convince the army that it is in its own interest to sign the accord and remedy the bad press it has been getting for disappearances, extra-judicial killings and deaths of civilians.

They argue that the draft accord prepared by the National Human Rights Commission doesn’t contain anything that Nepal hasn’t already ratified in various key international treaties. For its part, the army has been trying to clean up its act, announcing last week that it had jailed and discharged 25 soldiers, including a major, after investigations of serious rights violations. At another press meet on Thursday, Liz Rowsell of the Amnesty International team, which completed inspections in several districts last week, urged both the army and the Maoists to sign the accord. She told us: “The situation is extremely grave in Nepal. It is almost certain to become a catastrophe unless the international community, the government, civil society and others take action now.” (See interview above.)

French ambassador to Nepal, Claude Ambrosini who is looking after the interests of the current European President, Ireland, met the prime minister on Monday with other EU ambassadors, urging greater attention to human rights and brought up the subject of signing the accord. But officials told us the army was still not completely convinced, and signing now could undermine morale in the field and be seen as an admission of guilt.

Donor pressure has been growing ever since they grudgingly agreed to a \$70 million World Bank budget support in November. The EU statement this week warned of serious consequences for development assistance if Nepal’s parliamentary crisis dragged on.

Activists say the Maoists indicated during the ceasefire last year that they were willing to sign the human rights accord. Rebel leader Prachanda, in a surprisingly soft statement on Thursday, welcomed the EU’s call for a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement. He reiterated his group’s acceptance of any UN mediation or facilitation towards that end.

Human rights activists have urged the

government to convince the army that it has to seize the initiative and sign the accord first since and gain the moral high ground. The army needs to clean up its tarnished international image, which activists say could impact on future UN peacekeeping duties.

The army argues that donors and human rights groups are putting disproportionate pressure on the forces for violations, and say Maoist atrocities don’t come under as much scrutiny. “We know what we have to do, we are sensitive to human rights, but these criticisms are theoretical. We are fighting a guerrilla war, the ground reality is different,” said one senior military source.

Even so, human rights activists say that as the legitimate state party, it is the duty of the army to be more responsible than the rebels. One diplomat told us: “If the Maoists signed first, it would be a PR disaster for the government.”

Under the accord, there would be monitoring teams in the field that can be quickly deployed to conduct on-the-spot investigation of incidents. It could minimise distortions and inaccurate field reports as well as protect citizens from harm. And when the peace talks do restart, it will help in confidence-building and safeguarding the ceasefire. ●



IN THE CROSSFIRE: A woman from Dang being treated for bullet wounds at Bheri Zone Hospital in Nepalganj.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Journalism vs vandalism

Gross distortion in the coverage of the media war by newspapers on both sides is itself an indication that the casualty has been journalistic professionalism

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



Billowing black smoke from burning tyres on the streets this week joined with smoke from burning copies of *The Himalayan Times* and *Annapurna Post* over Kathmandu's streets. The tyres symbolised protest against 'regression', while burning newspapers apparently financed by Indian investors seem to augur the beginning of a 'swadeshi' movement.

Foreign direct investment in the Nepali media is a crucial issue with wide ramifications. To be sure, the entry of the two newspapers in the Nepali media market was not straightforward. While the government's declared policy doesn't exactly welcome foreign investment in media, successive past governments have chosen not to enact laws against it. This has left a loophole for any foreign group with professional or other interest to enter the Nepali media market. Certainly, the investment of *The Himalayan Times* (THT) and *Annapurna Post* (AP) and the role of local partners are not a hundred percent kosher. But the Group of Four who form the Nepal Media Society need to be pulled up for their brutal attack and boycott call against their rivals.

THT was launched two years ago. So why this protest now? A week before the ugly street scenes began, *The Kathmandu Post* (KP) joined the price war against THT by slashing its price to Rs 1.50 from Rs 4. While *The Kathmandu Post* fell into the trap laid by THT, its action triggered fear among fellow members in the Nepal Media Society of unfair competition which may drive them to extinction.

This is not a healthy media trend. In fact, gross distortion in the coverage of the media war itself in the newspapers of both camps have shown that the casualty is the professionalism that was evolving in the media sector in the past few years. Even the statement made by the prime minister and the government spokesman on the issue were selectively quoted by newspapers of the two sides depending on their allegiance.

The issue of foreign investment in the media therefore merits an urgent debate followed by the formulation of a clear policy. Such rules should be guided by longterm national interest, but also allow healthy competition that will enhance press freedom and benefit the readers. If the THT or AP should be investigated at all, it should be on reasonable evidence of having made the investment illegally. That can be done with a petition before the Supreme Court by the aggrieved party, or the setting up of a judicial

probe by the government.

The Nepal Media Society should be seeking due process, not duress through street protests. In fact the society should be at the forefront of decrying violence instead of instigating it. By taking to the streets, the society has shown that it doesn't believe in the rule of law. What next: stoning of each other's offices? And what if the street protests escalate out of control?

The CIAA also has a role in triggering the backlash against THT and its publishers, the Asia-Pacific Communications Association

(APCA). If it is showing so much eagerness to pursue the case of Kantipur's TV license and the detention of its managing director, it should also investigate the alleged irregularity in the APCA investment. All the CIAA did was write to the government to come out with a clearcut policy on foreign direct investment in the media. Is that really the CIAA's job?

Whether it is the CIAA or the media, exceeding the limits of authority is counterproductive. It is what has brought us to this sorry state. ●



THE FULBRIGHT & THE EAST-WEST CENTER 2004 SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION

The Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal announces the 2004 competition for the Fulbright and the East-West Center (EWC) Scholarships. Those selected would begin their US studies beginning August-September 2005. The Fulbright program provides all expenses (including travel) for a master's degree program of up to two years at selected U.S. universities, in any field except medicine, engineering or computer science. The EWC scholarships of the University of Hawaii (UH) are available for master's or doctoral-level study in any field offered at UH and cover all university tuition and fees, a partial monthly stipend, housing, health insurance, book allowance. However, candidates selected for the EWC scholarship will be responsible for partial monthly stipend of \$300 (unless granted the East-West Center Association Alumni Scholarship to cover this portion), transportation to and from Honolulu, and any other costs not provided by the Center. Applicants for either program may be employees in any government or semi-government agency, private business, NGO or INGO.

Application Forms & Deadlines

Application forms and detailed information regarding the competition are available from: the USEF/Nepal office at the American Center in Gyaneshwor (between 2 p.m. - 5 p.m., Monday - Friday); the Ministry of Education; the National Planning Commission; Tribhuvan University Rector's Office; Kathmandu University Rector's Office; Community Information Centers in Bhairahawa (Siddharth Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Kalikasthan), Nepalgunj (Chamber of Commerce, Tribhuvan Chowk), Pokhara (Pokhara Public Library, Mahendrapul), and Biratnagar (Chamber of Industries, Morang, Sahid Marg); and with Campus Chiefs at out of the Valley degree campuses. **Interested persons are encouraged to access and download the application and information from the Commission's website www.fulbrightnepal.org.np since the application form needs to be completed using a computer or a typewriter.** Duplicate, hardcopy, completed applications must reach the Fulbright Commission (USEF/Nepal) no later than 4:00 p.m. Friday, March 19, 2004. Incomplete applications or applications received after this deadline will not be considered.

General Requirements for Entering the Competition

All applicants must:

1. Possess Nepali citizenship.
2. Demonstrate in post-intermediate degrees a minimum aggregate mark of: 56% for students in non-technical fields (humanities and social sciences), and 60% for students in science and technical fields. (The minimum requirements for students under the semester system are: 65% in non-technical fields; 70% in technical fields; or a Cumulative GPA of 3.5/4.0 in either field.)
3. Have a high level of competence in speaking, reading and writing English. (Applicants who pass the first screening will be required to sit for an English test during the application process. The English language test requirement during the selection process may be waived for those who pass the initial screening and have either: a) a valid TOEFL score of 213 or higher; or 2) a score of 125 or higher in the English language test administered by USEF/Nepal in 2003.)
4. Be under 40 years of age for those applying for the master's degree under the Fulbright or EWC program, or be under 45 years of age for those applying for the Ph.D. degree under the EWC program, as of the application filing deadline date (March 19, 2004).
5. (a) Applicants for the master's degree under Fulbright or EWC program: possess either a four years bachelor's degree; or, if the bachelor's degree was of fewer than four years duration, then a master's degree is also required, such that the total number of years of formal education equals at least 16. Students with a three-year bachelor's degree who have completed only the first year of a two-year master's degree program, master's degree students who have cleared all exams but still need to fulfill other university-mandated degree requirements, or students who have two or more bachelor's degree but no master's degree are ineligible to apply.
(b) Applicants for the Ph.D. degree under EWC program: possess a master's degree that is equivalent to the US master's degree; that is, a master's degree that required at least 17 or 18 years of continuous study.
6. Applicants must have at least three years (for men) or one year (for women) of post-bachelor's degree, full-time, professional work experience in an area directly relevant to the applicant's chosen field of study as of the application filing deadline date (March 19, 2004). This experience must be documented by letters (or attested copies) from employer(s) that verify applicant's position(s) and years of employment. Even if you worked at several organizations, you are eligible to apply as long as your work experience at those organizations adds up to the minimum work-duration requirement.
7. Be in excellent health, as evidenced by a letter from a medical doctor; and
8. Be eligible for a non-immigrant J-1 U.S. visa, and not already in possession or in the process of obtaining a U.S. immigrant visa ("green card").

Note: Individuals holding master's degrees equivalent to a U.S. master's degree are ineligible to apply for the Fulbright scholarship competition, but are eligible to apply for the East-West Center competition Ph.D. program; and individuals who have previously resided in the United States for six months or more during the preceding five years are ineligible to apply for either competition.

(Applicants must submit documentary evidence for items No. 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7.)

What after SAFTA?

Nepal will not benefit unless it is prepared for regional free trade

KHADGA SINGH

When the SAARC heads of state met in New Delhi in 1995, they signed a charter that (among other things) promised to eradicate poverty from the region by 2002. One-fourth of the world's poor still live in South Asia.

Compared to such wishful thinking, the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) plan may be less ambitious, and therefore more likely to succeed. But if Nepal isn't prepared for free trade, it won't benefit from it. If we couldn't even act on the benefits of the 1995 South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) that was supposed to boost intra-regional trade on a commodity-wise basis, it is unlikely we will take any advantage from SAFTA.

Economists supported the SAPTA idea, but consumers and traders did not see any discernible changes. "The good news was that SAPTA came about earlier than expected," says Rajendra Khetan, the president of the Nepal Britain Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "The bad news is that the negotiations among member countries for tariff concessions went pretty slow."

In the last nine years, barely 5,000 items were tagged with concessions in an entire region of 1.5 billion people. And even after the agreement to lower

tariffs for the import of these goods by member countries, no deals were struck because some SAARC member countries had not done their homework. Those who did, discovered they could play by easier bilateral rules, and didn't need to get bogged down in a regional framework.

If SAPTA was a disaster, can SAFTA be any better? SAFTA plans to boost the present five percent intra-SAARC trade by phasing out tariff barriers and quota restrictions for goods between member countries over a 10-year period. The clock will start ticking for Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives to reduce their tariff rates to zero to five percent between 2006-2016. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will get five years to implement the new tariff regime. Sri Lanka will have six years.

Nepal may well bring tariff barriers down because it has already signed the draft SAFTA agreement. The same applies to other SAARC members. On paper, the idea looks lucrative. With tariff rates at zero by 2016, South Asia—home to one-fourth of humankind—will indeed be a huge market for member states. Theoretically, everyone stands to gain. But practically, countries will only gain if they are prepared.

Nepali officials still haven't figured out which commodities will be advantageous to us. "There has been

no research in this regard," says Hasta Dabadi, Executive Director at the FNCCL. "Without such a study, we are not in a position to say if we will benefit or lose from SAFTA. Such studies require massive investments which we can't afford."

But it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that landlocked Nepal's exports face a logistical problem, especially when it comes to exporting to a third country via India. Transit and transportation time inflates the price of goods that are usually available in South Asian countries at a much cheaper price. "There are problems with transit and transportation," says economist Bishwambar Pyakurel. "These add up the cost of our exports and minimise our comparative advantage."

India is Nepal's biggest trading partner to which we export around Rs 30 billion worth of goods annually. This could have reached saturation since India produced just about everything Nepal makes, and given its economies of scale, would find it expensive to import Nepali products. In such a situation, even if India lowers its tariffs for Nepali goods under the SAFTA provision, Nepalis would not be able to compete with Indian manufacturers.

What is true for India could apply to other South Asian markets. Under SAFTA, if the tariffs are brought down to zero in all SAARC nations, it will be



SUBHAS RAI

Indian products that will flood that market not Nepali products. There have been exceptions like Nepal's ghru and noodles, but with SAFTA in place, regional economic giants could cut into Nepal's comparative advantage.

Nepal must have a strategy if it is to benefit from SAFTA. If not, we'll lose out regionally and in the domestic market too. Lowered tariffs for imported products will mean regional foreign goods will inundate the market. If those products are better quality and cheaper, they will wipe out domestic production. "In such a scenario, the country will face a lose-lose situation," says Pyakurel. "Local producers will suffer loss because of a decline in export and sales. The government will also start losing

revenue."

But there will be one winner: the Nepali consumer. And if that can happen here, it can also happen in other South Asian countries. Nepali producers must sharpen their competitive edge, not just because of SAFTA but also because of WTO. "WTO and SAFTA will complement each other," says Prachanda Man Shrestha, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies. "That is why the trade rules and regulations we are changing will help us cope with the situation."

If the opportunities presented by WTO are the same as SAFTA but on a bigger scale, then the risks will also be bigger. This means Nepal has to gauge and calculate how we can take advantage. ●

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Private media reacts to competition with a cry-baby mantra of nationalism

Much can happen in two weeks. The Saturday after this column covered the beginning of the newspaper war, *The Himalayan Times* (THT) responded to *The Kathmandu Post's* price-cuts, and reduced its price by 50 percent to Rs 1. This marked a further victory for readers and advertisers of both newspapers. But THT's move turned out to be the last straw for the Nepal Media Society (NMS), a trade group of private-sector Nepali-owned newspaper publishers, and it swung into action. Not in a competitive, business-like way, but in a raw, crude, emotionally-laced cry-baby mantra of nationalism.

Through full-page ads, it attempted to turn people against THT and its sister publication *Annapurna Post* (AP) about a wire service news item that THT had published last November about the proceedings of a conference in India. A few days later, it changed its tactics and started to assert that foreigners (translation: Indians) should not be allowed to invest in the "sensitive" Nepali print-media. That doing so would pose a threat to Nepal's sovereignty, and, as the TKP editor Prateek Pradhan (who earned a degree in journalism in New York) put it, would lead to the 'Sikkimisation of Nepal'.

Before 1991, there were only two broadsheet dailies: *Gorkhapatra* and *The Rising Nepal* and the state ran them as it still does. Now there are more than 12 broadsheets, all run by private money which has been invested in attracting talented

journalists, to upgrade printing technology, and to market and distribute newspapers. Good Nepali journalists today enjoy greater job mobility.

Readers also have a wider choice and advertisers have a pick. Newspapers have competed with one another and with other forms of media for subscribers' fees and advertising rupees,

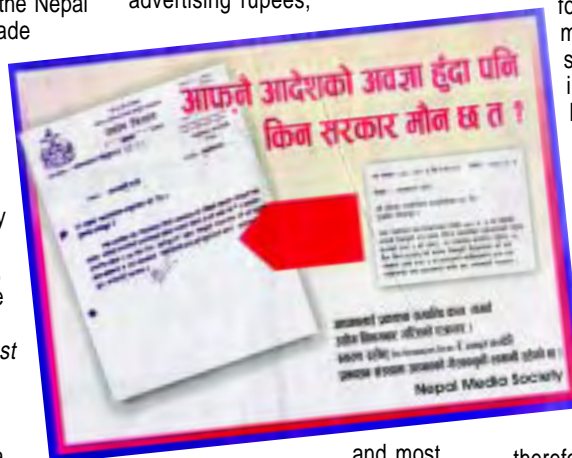
share of the advertisement pie.

Since they cannot share this worry publicly, they have to have it wear the daura-suruwal of nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to national interests than, say, building hydropower dams or running trainings of Nepali journalists paid by foreign funds. Saying that foreign investment in print-media is detrimental to Nepal's sovereignty is an insult to the intelligence of Nepali readers. It also misleads others as to how the ad market works.

As Pratyoush Onta argued in this paper two years ago when THT first appeared on the scene, no commercially-run newspaper, no matter how well funded, can hope to do well in any market by offending local sensibilities (see: 'What to do when big brother knocks', #55). The logic of the ad market,

therefore, acts as an in-built deterrent against any newspaper issuing outrageous claims. That means, if anything, both THT and AP have no choice but to be more Nepali than other newspaper. Meantime, we can rest assured that just as Nepali society's *ijjat* does not depend up on what Miss Nepal wears, Nepal's sovereignty too does not depend what the what the owners of private-sector newspapers say to protect their own interests.

As for the argument allowing foreigners run print-media would lead to the 'Sikkimisation of Nepal', all one can say that the good editors seems to have too little faith in his compatriots to make decisions for themselves. ●



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Royal role

The king and the people need each other

King Gyanendra used the word ‘people’ 25 times in the full text of the 2,300-word interview that appeared on the online version of the *Time* magazine last week. The thrust of the interview was contained in one sentence: “Stop saying ‘me’. Say ‘us.’ Stop saying ‘party’. Say ‘people’.”

He concludes the interview by saying: “If the people are happy, the king is happy. And my fear is that we might be heading for a ditch if the people, their grievances and their betterment are not thought of. I put myself in their shoes every night.”

The interview probably leaves a positive impression on a reader not closely following Nepali politics. But

for those of us involved in researching and analysing the Nepali political scene, it does not appear any different from what the Kangresis, Emales, Maoists and others have been saying. In short, the king is sounding like a politician.

King Gyanendra reiterates his desire to play a “constructive role”. It may now be time for us to evaluate whether his role so far has been constructive or not. Independent commentators and scholars, within Nepal and outside, will do that, and history will judge if their assessment is correct.



But the real question is whether politics is the arena for a constitutional monarch to play a constructive role. Can a king address the suffering of the Nepali people by playing politics? Is politics the way to serve and speak on their behalf?

A constitutional king’s role is to address the concerns of the people by being non-political, or by rising above politics. Not to be dragged into day-to-day controversy, but to remain above it. Let the politicians deal with politics, the monarch’s role should be to be a role model for development, to set new standards for charity and relief that others can follow.

Adding luxury cars to the palace’s fleet of limousines sends the wrong message at the wrong time. Approving a higher budget for the royal household when hundreds of thousands of Nepalis are

grieving is inappropriate. An ideal move for King Gyanendra at the present time would be to set up a charitable trust in his brother’s name and in memory of relatives slain on 1 June 2001, financed by their assets. But who is going to tell the king?

Royals in other countries have set examples by being patrons of charitable institutions and development causes. In a country devastated by war, with hundreds of thousands internally displaced, thousands orphaned and bereaved, such a royal role is even more urgently required. Once such an initiative is launched, there will be no shortage of philanthropists and charities inside and outside Nepal who will pour in counterpart funds for relief to support such a pious cause started by none other than the monarch himself.

Britain is a country which members of Nepal’s royal family visit every year. It must have come to their notice that in Britain the members of the royal family raise hundreds of millions of pounds for charitable causes to make up for what the state spends on them. We in Nepal should have a foundation modeled on the ‘Prince’s Trust’ which raises money for charitable causes that bring immediate relief to the disadvantaged.

By all accounts, King Gyanendra is an intelligent man. But intelligence may not be enough to change the course of history and redefine the role of the 21st century monarch as he wants to do.

That needs wisdom, statesmanship, social commitment and sincerity.

A lot of it is also about perception, and the public’s perception should be of a monarch who is above rhetoric, who is not just playing politics. Our politicians have done that for too long.

The king and his family need to be involved in activities that directly benefit the people, and for once really put themselves in the people’s shoes. ●

Robin Raj is a London-based researcher.

SUNIL POKHREL

Nepal is not just rich in hydropower, it also has big deposits of oil and gas. Theoretically, the Nepal tarai is a vast repository of subterranean hydrocarbon. But arcane tax laws and lack of political will have hindered prospecting.

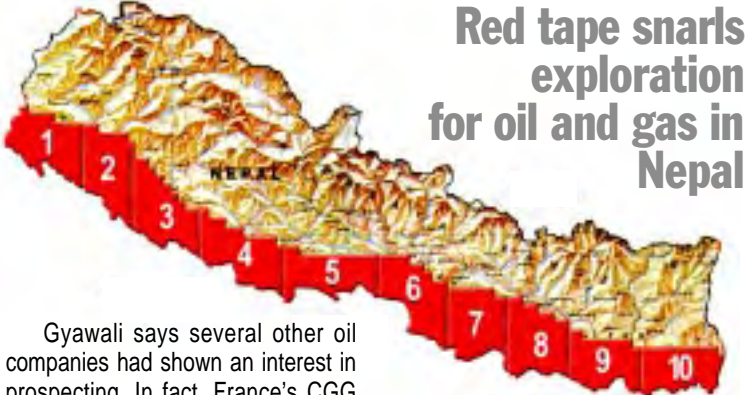
Experts at the Department of Mines and Geology say the northern part of the Ganga Basin has ideal geomorphological conditions for oil deposits similar to the ones found in Assam. The presence of gas seeps in Muktinath and along the Himalayan midhills also prove that there is something down there. Analysis of rock samples from Dailekh and Dang strongly indicate the presence of petroleum. Indian test drills in the Ganga plains south of the border have also shown positive traces of hydrocarbon deposits.

“There is oil in Nepal, and we have had oil prospecting contracts, but there have been all kinds of bureaucratic hurdles in getting the oil out,” explains Bharat Mani Gyawali, chief of the Petroleum Exploration Promotion Project.

The tarai and Siwalik along Nepal’s southern border have been divided into 10 exploration blocks of 5,000 sq km each. In 1989-90 Shell Nepal BV carried out test drilling in Block 10, including geochemical analysis of seep samples. The company also carried out a gravity and seismic survey to map out possible deposit sites. However, an exploratory well turned out to be dry.

Tarai crude

Red tape snarls exploration for oil and gas in Nepal



Gyawali says several other oil companies had shown an interest in prospecting. In fact, France’s CGG carried out aeromagnetic and seismic reflection surveys along the tarai. During the Indian blockade in 1989-90, Panchayat leaders made some political capital out of sloganeering that Nepal should find its own oil. But officials say political leaders have never been really serious about looking for it. “We are so mesmerised by hydropower, that we only paid lip service to oil and gas,” admitted one official.

The government finally called for international bids and in 1997 the US-based Texana Resources proposed to explore Block 3 in Nepalganj and Block 5 in Chitwan. By that time, the Maoist insurgency was already creating problems and Texana backed out, using the force majeure clause. The company couldn’t get hold of the explosives required to create the artificial seismic waves to test for deposits, official say.

The Department of Mines and Geology then held talks with Cairn Energy PLC which has experience prospecting in South Asia, and the group agreed to resume exploration work. But Cairn is said to be unhappy about Nepali tax laws which do not

tally with laws in neighbouring countries.

Gyawali asks testily: “The success rate in oil prospecting is 10 percent, there is a huge risk factor. How can law makers treat oil in the same way as noodles?” The Income Tax Law 2058 has defined a strict timeframe to recover the capital cost of exploration, which is not the case in India where the prospectors are not required to pay taxes during the recovery period.

The legislation further proposes a 10 percent repatriation tax with 30 percent income tax and a 100 percent bank guarantee. But the Ministry of Finance is said to be reluctant to budge.

Cairn has written to the department saying that unless the laws are changed it doesn’t see any viability prospecting for oil and gas in Nepal and has decided to pull out. “Our laws, red tape and the bureaucratic hoops that we make foreign investors jump through are the biggest deterrent to potential investors,” says Gyawali. “Our demand for oil is growing, there are refineries right across the border from Nepal. We must have a strategy and get moving.” ●

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Identity crisis

Purists don't like the ethnic chic that goes with modern architectural restoration in Patan

MUDITA BAJRACHARYA



BEFORE AND AFTER: Two wings of the Chadaun Chapal Chhen in Chyasal Tole in Patan before and after restoration in 2001.



At a time when the city cores of the Valley's town are seeing a revival of traditional architecture, some heritage conservationists are worried that new restoration techniques are not true to the original building designs.

In the centre of Patan, a 400-year-old street front building was torn down recently. It wasn't replaced with a modern glass and concrete block, but a modern five-storey apartment with a brick façade, tile brick roof, traditional carved windows and doors. Krishna Maharjan, the

building's owner, is part of a new generation of house-owners at the forefront of a Newari architectural renaissance in Patan. But instead of being praised for his effort, he is getting criticism from conservationists who say it disturbs the harmony of the old town.

It is an age-old debate between how much compromise is too much in the struggle between heritage conservation and modern living. Should we be thankful that there is at least some respect for the past, or aim for a purity of form that may never be attainable?

Chapal Chhen at Chhaya Bahal was a 300-year-old guthi building in Patan in which the Jyapu Samaj conducted rituals and bhoj. The two-storey structure was falling apart and in 1999, the guthi decided to

tear it down. In its place today is a five-storey building with a concrete skeleton and a traditional brick and tile façade. The guthi rents the floors out to businesses, shops and functions to finance its festivals and other pujas.

Guthi member Babulal Maharjan brushes aside criticism that his new building is not in harmony with the city's old heart. "We have rebuilt it independently in a traditional style, and it is part of our effort to make the guthi self-

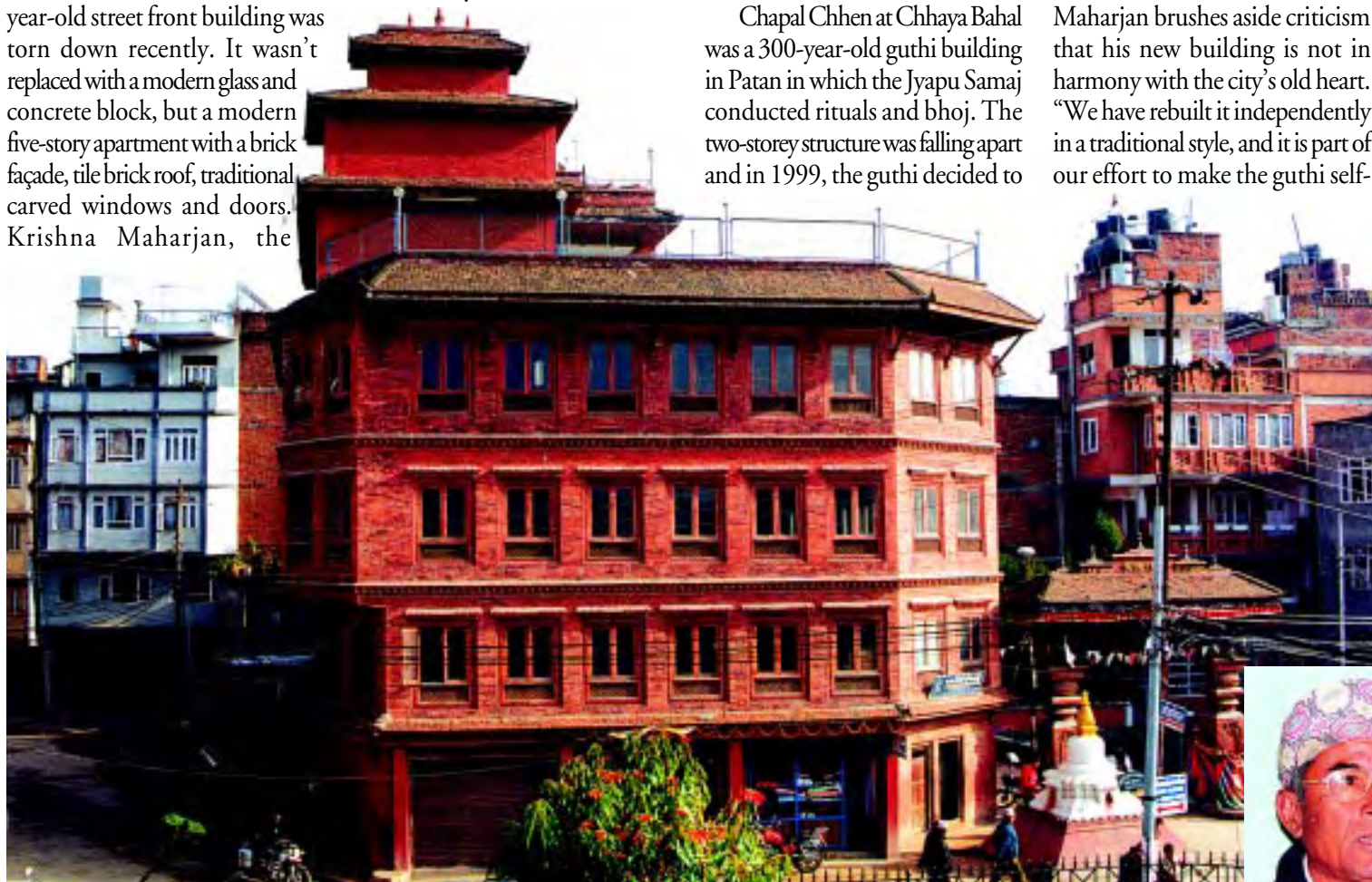
sustaining so we don't have to depend on donations from guthiyars," he told us. "People should be glad that we didn't make it like a concrete box, we are true to our traditions."

Patan Mayor Buddhi Raj Bajracharya admits that some guthi buildings in his historic town are being demolished and the new structures are not rebuilt according to traditional designs or dimensions. But he adds: "We appreciate the collective effort of locals in Patan to preserve their traditional architecture, and we don't want to discourage that."

In Chyasal Tole, 300-year-old Tadaun Chapal guthi buildings belonging to the Byanjakar Samaj were demolished three years ago and the traditional mud and mortar buildings were replaced with modern structures. The reconstruction and designs were overseen by the German-aided Urban Development through Local Effort (UDLE) project.

Many guthiyars donated money for the reconstruction, and locals contributed voluntary labour.

The chairman of the Chyasal Tile Sudhar Samiti, Govinda Man Byanjakar justifies the restoration: "The previous



HOW ORIGINAL? This five-storey guthi building at Chapal Chhen at Chhaya Bahal replaced a two-storey original, and the chairman of Ward 21, Babu Lal Maharjan (inset)

ALL PICS: MUDITA BAJRACHARYA



Jharana Joshi, conservation officer at UMEDP

structure was weak and used up a lot of space, we have changed the interior while keeping the exterior character of the buildings,” he said. Indeed, there has been an effort to conserve the original brick masonry and retain the essence of Newari architecture in Chyasal.

But Jharana Joshi, a conservation officer with the Urban Management and Economic Diversification Project (UMEDP) doesn’t agree. “It is a great loss to replace the Tadaun Chapal with a drastically different structure, it has altered the architectural history of the place.”

In this tug-o’-war between conservation and modern architectural preservation, it is hard to say when the threshold of genuine heritage restoration has been crossed. And at a time when there is so much destruction going on, most town

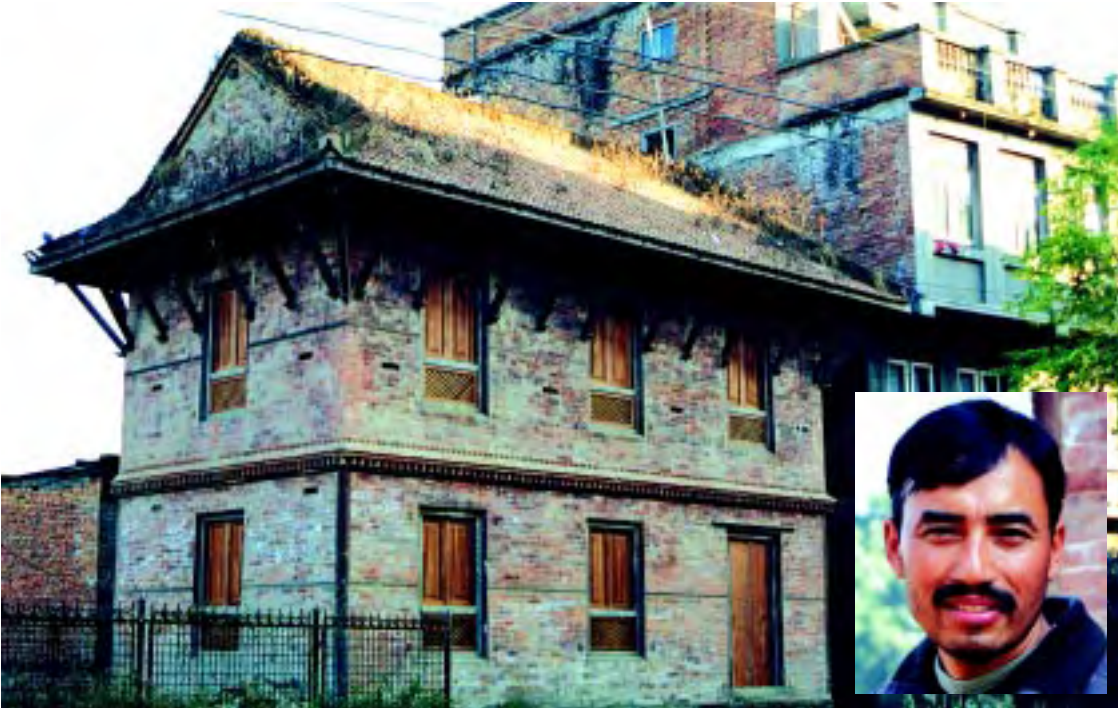
planners and architects are thankful that there is at least some sensitivity to the past, even if it is not 100 percent pure.

Heritage conservations need to balance the outside look with the changing lifestyles of house-owners and their need for modern interiors with higher ceilings, more light, more ventilation and better insulation against noise and heat.

Increasing economic pressure and the fragmentation of joint families have resulted in the vertical subdivision of houses, damaging their original character. In the absence of technical supervision, municipal oversight and the lack of subsidies for conservation, more and more houses are reconstructed rather than renovated.

Dilendra Raj Shrestha of Third World Guest House in Patan has renovated his neo-classical house, and says: “We must prioritise houses according to period and state of dilapidation and have a clear vision about what is realistically achievable.” Shrestha has overseen the renovation of an old guthi house with help from UNESCO into a bed and breakfast pension in Patan that is true to the town’s historical heritage. In future, this could be a sustainable model for income from heritage tourism to finance more restoration. At present, Patan’s bylaws encourage the adoption of ‘traditional Nepali style’ but fail to explain what these are.

The overlapping responsibilities of the municipality, Department of



GOOD AS NEW: The restored Ward 8 building and ward chairman, Prem Maharjan (inset)

Archaeology, the Town Development Committee and the priorities of various donor-assisted projects have clashed in Patan, creating confusion. There is resistance to take responsibility and many urban house-owners simply use loopholes in the law to rebuild without any thought to conservation.

There is an added consideration: which historical period should restoration be true to? In restoring the Patan Durbar Square, for instance, does one go back to the pre-1934 earthquake, or restore the temples and buildings to the southern-European styles adopted by the Ranas with stucco window borders and venetian blinds? Purists

scoff at Austrian architects who restored the eastern wing of the Patan Museum with visible steel beams to make the structure earthquake proof.

For Jharana Joshi at UMEDP, a model for true restoration should be like the rebuilding of the Ward 8 building. It is true to the original proportions, using the same local materials so that conservation does not become a caricature of the building that it replaced. Indeed, the Ward 8 building with the vegetation on its roof is an exact replica of the two-storey house it replaced, and is dwarfed by hideous concrete apartment

blocks adjacent to it.

Joshi says traditional houses have their drawbacks: they are dark, damp, have low ceilings and leaky roofs. But many of these can be addressed with glass windows, damp-proof foundations and water-resistant roof tiles. “In addition, we can take advantage of the insulation properties of the thick walls with mud and mortar construction,” she adds.

Ward 8 chairman, Prem Maharjan is happy with his building. “We nearly went for a cement building, because we thought it would be more durable, but decided on the brick face and traditional elements so that we could set an example for others about our heritage.”

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पोखरा: ०६१-५३८८१३
नेपालगंज: ०८१-५२३८४८

काठमाडौं उपत्यका भित्रका विक्रेताहरूले ग्राहक वन वा बनाउन चाहिँमा आर.बी. म्यूज एजेन्सी, फोन: ४२३२७८४, २०२०२४७ मा सम्पर्क गर्नु होला।

Wild about rice



Rice production is arguably the most important economic activity on the planet. And, for those who yawn and ask what an international year tag can achieve, it may be useful to go back to 1966, which FAO declared International Rice Year. That was also the year the Green Revolution started sweeping across Asia, the great leap forward in rice that built the foundation of food security and rural stability that Asia needed for its subsequent economic development.

COMMENT Ronald P Cantrell



So will the current International Year of Rice help give birth to another revolution in Asia's rural areas? 2004 will see Asia awash with rice festivals, rice conferences and rice workshops, allowing this simple grain to attract the attention of the media, politicians, government officials and hundreds of public and civil organisations.

Perhaps 2004 will be the year when the people of Asia realise that we share one common value or belief: a deep appreciation of rice. More than politics, religion or culture, rice is the one thing that truly defines Asia, and there is no doubt that the food that defines the region is already undergoing some revolutionary changes.

No one can sustain economic development without finding a way to lift rice farmers out of poverty. This is an especially crucial challenge for the world's two most populous nations: China and India, and the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia.

There are other revolutionary changes and challenges:

- The sequencing of the rice genome. Some scientific experts called the sequencing of the rice genome more important for mankind than the sequencing of the human genome. Much of this knowledge looks like it will be in the public domain and so available for researchers throughout the developing world to use without the restrictions imposed by private ownership.
- Ownership. For generations, farmers freely shared

varieties. As the science of plant breeding developed, countries, organisations, institutes and even some private companies also shared their varieties. Countries all over Asia have introduced plant variety rights legislation to protect their biological assets and, as part of this process, laid claim to the rice varieties they can justifiably call theirs.

- Nutrition. While most people prefer rice polished white, a small but growing minority like it brown. In its white form, the grain lacks micronutrients essential to human health. Most rice consumers get these micronutrients from dishes they eat with rice, rather than from rice itself. Poor rice consumers, who can't always afford the meat and vegetables they should have with their rice, often suffer from poor nutrition. Scientists are now working on developing rice varieties that are high in iron and vitamin A, the developing world's two worst dietary deficiencies.

- Water. Using traditional irrigation methods, producing one kg of rice can take up to 4,000 litres of water. Today, half of Asia's developed freshwater resources are used to irrigate rice. Now is the time to develop technologies to allow farmers to grow as much rice they do now using much less water.

- Rice research. Funding for public-sector rice research at the national, regional and international level is stagnating, and the interest that the private sector has shown in recent years appears to be waning. In the heyday of the Green Revolution from the 1960s to the early 1980s, the rice-producing nations of Asia managed to maintain annual yield increases of 2.5 percent and production increases of over 3 percent. However, starting in the middle of the 1980s, yield growth has slowed by almost half, and production growth has almost disappeared. As a result, the rice-growing rural communities of many Asian nations are increasingly restless, trapped in poverty and urgently in need of new strategies and fresh ideas to help them improve their lives. ●

Ronald P Cantrell is the director general of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Banos, the Philippines.

We are what we eat



There is another reason to protect Nepal's wetlands: they are repositories of wild rice varieties

Most Nepalis do not need to set aside a year to 'celebrate' the importance of rice—it's already their staple diet. Indeed, rice is the main food for more than half of humanity. Archaeological evidence from central Thailand shows that human beings have cultivated rice for the past 6,000 years.

In Nepal, rice fields make up 325,000 hectares, accounting for most of the country's total cultivated land area. Nepal's *Jumli marshi dhan* is a cold tolerant variety that is the world's highest-growing rice—cultivated at altitudes of nearly 3,000 metres.

We will hear a lot about rice in 2004. But for us in Nepal it is important to look at the places from where this resource was taken and locally developed by farmers over centuries. The last of our wild wetlands still hosts this diversity. Wild rice species occur in the Himalayan foothills, Asian river deltas, Caribbean islands, Amazon River basin and inland swamplands of southern and western Africa. Although rice is found mostly in tropical areas, the existence of one species (*Oryza rufipogon*) in Pokhara and surrounding the Bulbule Lake area of Surkhet is the highest

latitude of wild rice growth reported in the world.

In Nepal, various species of wild rice are found in the plains, the Pokhara valley, Kamalpokhari in Palpa, Bulbule lake area in



Wild rice from Ajingara Tal in Kapilbastu

Surkhet, Kapilvastu, Nepalganj, the Lothar forest of Chitwan, the Kankai Irrigation Headwork area of Jhapa, the Sundarpur Agricultural Farm area of Kanchanpur and

Nijgadh in Bara. Many of these wetland sites, important habitats of wild rice, are being degraded because of encroachment for conversion into rice fields, fishponds, extended settlements and sedimentation.

Although local communities use wild rice during religious and cultural occasions, they are not fully aware of the value of these wetland genetic resources and often consider it a weed. Government policy has also not given enough importance to the conservation of wild rice, and these habitats may soon be lost forever.

Nepal has four species of wild rice of which one is an upland species and the others are mostly found in tarai wetlands. A weedy wild rice sometimes occurs in tarai wetlands mixed with cultivated rice. The wild relatives of rice grown are important because they contain the original genetic material of cultivated rice. Although it is fit for human consumption, it is not cultivated because harvesting is tedious. Wild rice is usually harvested for cattle feed.

Every year from October-December, the people around Ajingara Lake in Kapilbastu tie cloth and plastic bags on wild rice plants to

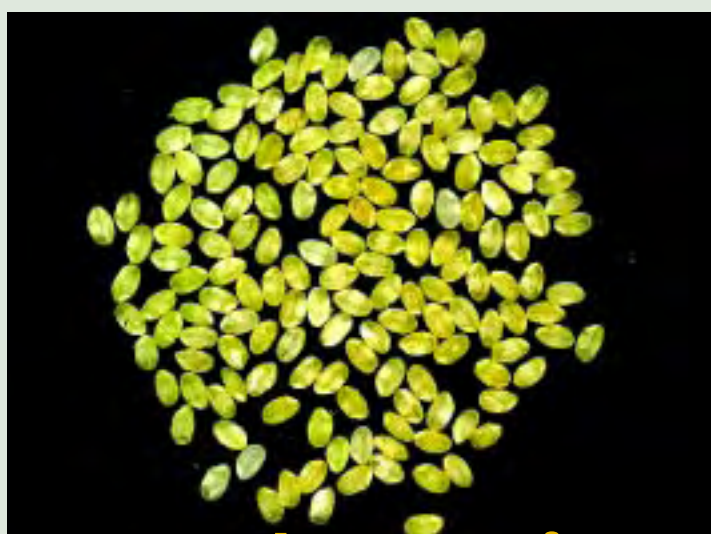
collect their seeds called *tinna/tinni* rice that are eaten during the *Chhat* festival and fasts like *ekadashi*. In the Lumbini area, wild rice (*O rufipogon*) has been culturally associated with the tarai ethnic communities.

In Nepal, farmers have developed and grown more than 95 local aromatic and fine rice varieties. Kaski district alone used to have more than 75 local varieties. Today only 11 varieties are widely grown. The remaining are being replaced or discontinued because of modern, higher yielding 'improved' seeds. Farmers in Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve used to cultivate multiple varieties of rice to reduce crop depredation and damage from wild animals. These varieties have now been replaced with modern ones.

Despite the potential of wild rice, little has been done to study its significant traits and breeding habits. The government seems more interested in importing new modern hybrid seeds than conserving native wild rice species.

To protect Nepal's wild rice and its genetic resource for posterity, we need to protect our wetlands where they grow. ●

(Sameer Karki)



Franken-rice

All that glitters may not be gold

Last year, 67.7 million hectares of genetically modified crops were grown all over the world. Although most of the crop was of the four main commercial kinds—soyabean, maize, cotton and canola—it seems transgenic rice is going to be a major produce of the very near future. And it won't be long before the transgenic rice seeds arrive in Nepal.

There are already over 160 patents granted or pending for various strains of GM rice. They contain genetic information from the DNA of other species to give the rice traits ranging from bigger grain to insect resistance. The latest big thing centres on 'golden rice'—containing a daffodil gene that produces beta-carotene, a compound the human body converts to vitamin A.

It's not commercially available yet, but many see golden rice as the answer to the over one million child deaths each year and the 300,000 cases of blindness caused by severe vitamin A deficiency. Biotech giant Monsanto has even announced it will give away free licenses to use its patented technology for golden rice and other genetically engineered rice varieties in order to help with these problems.

However, all that glitters is not gold. In addition to the usual arguments against GM crops, critics of golden rice protest that even with the added nutrients, it would be nearly impossible to get the required vitamin A from a normal serving of rice. Some are sceptical of the longterm effects of the crop—a valid concern considering some of the other GM 'miracles' gone wrong in the past. Others doubt that it can really be adapted to local growing conditions any time soon. A few even see golden rice as a Trojan Horse that is to be sent into the developing world to get people used to the idea of GM foods before less benign crops are introduced.

Since over half of the world's population's staple diet is rice, the argument that golden rice and other fortified strains may be the solution to current malnutrition problems is compelling. ●

(Jemima Sherpa)

Our rice

Fifty years ago, a Japanese agricultural consultant arrived in Nepal to advise farmers on the latest agricultural techniques. He returned home earlier than anticipated, saying there was nothing he could teach Nepali rice farmers.

The production of rice was good, the taste even better, and entire families sustained themselves using traditional methods to plant an astounding variety of rice: Gudgude Marsi, Thauli, Mansara, Anadi, Rajbhog, Krishnabhog, Samundra Pheenz, Phalame.

At Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC) Bhola Man Singh Basnet, says this year Nepal has recorded the highest yield ever: 2.9 tons per hectare. But 79 percent of the rice fields grow high-yield hybrid rice, which means local varieties are being driven out. The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines preserves 1,800 local Nepali rice germplasm in a refrigerated earthquake-proof vault. The gene bank includes the rich Tilki from Dang and the aromatic Jetho Budo from Pokhara.

"Local varieties are important because they are disease, drought and insect-resistant," explains Basnet. IRRI's Green Revolution rice provides higher yield, but lack the adaptability of local seeds.

In Kathmandu, some of the more popular improved varieties found in the market include Khumal-4, a fine non-glutinous rice and Manjushree-2, another popular fine rice. Thaichung-176 is a glutinous rice very popular in Kathmandu, particularly among the Newars to make *chiura* and *jand*. Nepalis prefer the less sticky non-glutinous rice because it is easier to eat with the fingers.

Those eager to sample Nepali rice needn't worry. It's Binita Khanal's business to know where local varieties are grown and make them available to Kathmandulays through her direct selling Bazar Enterprises Network which provides pulses, tea, oil, spices, rice and more bought directly from the producers.

There are four main Nepali rice found in Kathmandu: Mansuli, Pokhrali, Jeera Maseeno and several varieties of Basmati. The most popular is Mansuli which is cheaper with higher yields.



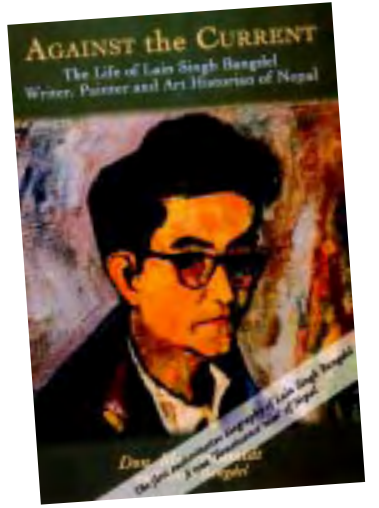
MIN BAJRACHARYA

Pokhrel and Jeera Maseeno are more popular among the middle- and higher-middle class, while Basmati varies according to quality. Khanal's personal favourite is Jeera Maseeno: "It's good for my entire household, my employees and my children alike. We all eat the same quality of rice and Jeera Maseeno is average."

Her own experience has been that rice grown in the belt spanning Sundarjal to Panauti tastes best. To those who want to sample different varieties of rice, the old quarter of Asan and Mangal Bazar have a lot to offer. The ancient shops sell an astounding variety of rice piled into old oil tins, and the vendors will guide you through the properties of each rice. ●

Lain's legacy

A new biography celebrates the life and works of one of Nepal's artistic giants



Lain Singh Bangdel's 'Struggle for Democracy', 1990, painted in Nepal (left). Bangdel with BP Koirala and his wife, Manu Kumari in London in 1960 (below, left) and with Indian director Satyajit Ray in Kathmandu in 1987.



SRADDHA BASNYAT

From the son of a Darjeeling tea estate clerk, he eventually became an artist-scholar recognised at home and abroad for his immense contribution to the Nepali art. The life and work of Lain Singh Bangdel is the subject of *Against the Current: The Life of Lain Singh Bangdel Writer, Painter and Art Historian of Nepal* written by established Nepal-hand Don Messerschmidt with Bangdel's daughter, Dina, currently an art historian at Ohio State University.

Messerschmidt, an anthropologist who has spent nearly 30 years in Nepal, was intrigued by Bangdel and approached him about writing a biography. "Lain wrote like a painter, he used the pen like a brush. Now I'm painting him in words," says Messerschmidt.

Growing up in a Nepali migrant family in Darjeelingtown, as they called it, Bangdel remembers a feeling of disconnect, of rootlessness, that was later reflected in his novels and

paintings. As a young boy, Bangdel waited for *Teej* when he could paint colourful motifs on the walls of the festival's *maitighar*. His upbringing in a Hindu family, and schooling by Protestant and Hindu educators taught Bangdel to respect all religions. But father, Ranglal, didn't allow him to play with the children of common labourers, having worked hard to raise his family's status. It was during his enforced solitude that Bangdel began to sketch—his inspiration found in nature's unparalleled palette.

In high school during the 1930s, Bangdel was influenced by three Nepali intellectuals: poet Dharnidhar Koirala, Parasmani Pradhan, a Nepali language teacher and Suryabikram Gewali, collectively known as 'SuDhaPa'. Gewali introduced Bangdel to the 19th century poet Bhanubhakta Acharya and Bangdel discovered

his other passion—words. He passed the entrance exams to the University of Calcutta. Dad Ranglal who would have preferred his son to be a doctor or teacher, gave Bangdel some money but told him he'd be on his own.

In July 1939, Bangdel headed to Calcutta, his first serious move toward studying art at the Calcutta Arts College. Calcutta was a place where young intellectuals, artists and politicians came together in war-time pre-independence India. In an effort to create an identity for himself, Bangdel changed his surname from Rai to Bangdel, the name of his clan.

But for all this social and political activity around him, Bangdel got through school relying on his art and writings to express his deep humanitarian concerns, remaining apolitical. In 1945, he graduated at the top of his class, and continued to live and work in Calcutta for several more years. Bangdel produced three novels between 1948 and 1951. During

his time in Calcutta Bangdel met many influential people and made lasting friendships. Among them: dramatist Balkrishna Sama who rebelled against his Rana ancestry and Satyajit Ray, whose artistic cinematography made strong social statements, became Bangdel's close friends.

At the age of 31, Bangdel had a chance to go to Paris after General Kaiser Shamsheer JB Rana, impressed by Bangdel's portrait of Balkrishna Sama, gave him Rs 5,000. On route he spent four months in London. There he became reacquainted with Manu Kumari Thapa whom he knew from Darjeeling and Calcutta. He toured museums and galleries, losing himself in the works of Leonardo de Vinci and Rembrandt.

Paris was overwhelming. Everything was new—the language, art, techniques, styles. Bangdel learned French and began to paint again in a tiny studio apartment. Winters were bitterly cold but he survived, sometimes on a single apple a day. These trials gave birth

to some of his best works like the *Muna-Madan* series, *Mother Nepal* (1953), *Pensive Mood* (1955) and *Famine in Bengal* (1856-59). He was influenced by existential writers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Bangdel met Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso and began leaning towards an abstract style influenced by nature.

Bangdel and Manu Kumari corresponded and in 1953 he proposed to her. She wrote back confused, concerned what her parents would say. She was the eldest child of Chatra Singh Thapa, a descendent of General Amar Singh Thapa. They were married in Paris during spring.

In 1957, BP Koirala came to Europe and met Bangdel. He came again in 1960, when the couple were living in London. Koirala tried to persuade Bangdel to return to Nepal but the Bangdels had plans to migrate to Canada. Then in 1961, while on a state visit to London, King Mahendra asked Bangdel when he would return to Nepal. Bangdel felt committed.

Unsure of their decision, the two came to Nepal where their only child Dina was born in 1963. For the next three decades Bangdel dedicated much of his time to the Royal Nepal Academy, making the Nepal Association of Fine Arts efficient and co-founded the Nepal Art Council. He also turned himself into an art historian and was fascinated with Kathmandu's unique heritage which had been little studied and was falling prey to antique smugglers. So Bangdel set out to document Nepal's ancient heritage, particularly stone sculptures, producing books like *Early Sculptures of Nepal* (1982), *2500 years of Nepali Art* (1987) and *Inventory of Stone Sculptures of the Kathmandu Valley* (1995). His most popular and most important book, however, was *Stolen Images of Nepal* (1989), documenting 300 missing religious objects from Kathmandu.

Bangdel died during Dasai of 2002. He wrote and painted to the very end. *Against the Current* by Don Messerschmidt is due to be released this month. Order forms are at Mandala Book Point for the special limited edition available only in Nepal at Rs 850. ●



Vajpayee's gamble

ANALYSIS
Praful Bidwai



With the announcement by India's ruling coalition that it will ask for the dissolution of the Lower House of Parliament on 6 February, the country is all set for national elections to get underway probably five months before the term of the House ends. By all indications, it will be a contentious, sharp and bitter fight. Contrary to appearances, the Hindu-nationalist, right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is not about to sweep the polls or win a clear parliamentary majority on its own.

The ruling multiparty National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which the BJP dominates, might be hard put to repeat its performance in the last elections in 1999. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee himself has warned his party that the electoral battle will be fierce. There are several reasons for this, and at least four are important.

First, the NDA is a shrinking entity, unlike five years ago. In the past 15 months, six of its original 22 constituents have quit the alliance, including regional parties from southern Tamil Nadu state and smaller organisations representing groups like Dalits (untouchables) from eastern Bihar state and farmers in the western part of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state.

The biggest blow to the BJP was the breakdown of its alliance in Uttar Pradesh with the strong Dalit Bahujan Samaj Party and that party's decision to oppose the BJP tooth and nail in the coming elections. Second, the anti-NDA opposition is making serious efforts to form alliances so as not to divide its vote. (Traditionally, ruling parties in India

tend to gain disproportionately from high levels of opposition disunity, rather from their own popularity.)

Crucial to these efforts is the Indian National Congress' decision not to go in alone and to explore the broadest possible coalition with other parties. The Congress party, which has ruled India for more than 45 years of the 56 years of independence, until recently used to consider itself the natural party of governance and was loathe to form coalitions. Recent defeats in three important state assembly elections have jolted the Congress out of its arrogance and complacency.

It is now negotiating alliances with other parties from Kashmir in the north to Tamil Nadu in the deep south and from Maharashtra in the west to the seven small north-eastern states. A third reason why the coming elections will be closely fought is that in India, the party or parties in power tend to suffer the disadvantage of incumbency. In the past 30 years, a ruling coalition has been returned to power at the national level only once in two consecutive elections. The Indian voter prefers to punish parties rather than reward them.

The BJP/NDA rode on the anti-incumbency wave in 1998, when the ruling centre-Left coalition collapsed. Today, the NDA faces the incumbent's disadvantage. Finally, the BJP has sharply polarised Indian society and politics as never before. There are two main lines of division: one along the issue of religion and politics, which the BJP mixes dangerously; and the other, on economic policies with sharp class biases.

The BJP is an ideologically driven party that stands for Hindu supremacism and a Hindu state, which will privilege this 80 percent majority. The party is closely tied to extremist and violent organisations

notorious for attacks on and persecution of religious minorities, besides vandalism and rabid intolerance. Eleven years ago, the BJP and its associates razed to the ground a 16th century mosque in Uttar Pradesh, which they regarded as a symbol of the Muslim conquest of Hindu India in the Middle Ages. (Historians have a very different, multicultural, multi-religious, view of India's past).

Less than two years ago, the Hindu-nationalists butchered over 2,000 Muslims in the state of Gujarat in retaliation for the burning alive of 60 Hindu-nationalist cadres in a railway train—for which the victimised Muslims were in no way responsible. India's religious minorities, some 180 million people—or bigger than Brazil's population—have never felt more insecure than under the BJP's rule. The opposition sees the BJP as a major menace to India's secular Constitution and pluralist democracy. The BJP has also promoted brazenly elitist neoliberal economic policies, which have destroyed public services and undermined food security while further enriching the already rich.

In the last three years of NDA rule, India's GDP growth slowed down. But much worse was the rise in unemployment, especially in the rural areas where 70 percent of India's population lives. The economy only absorbs about a third of the new entrants into the job market. But the incomes of the top tenth of the population have substantially increased—creating what the government crudely terms the 'feel good' or 'India Shining' factor publicised in expensive television and print advertisements.

India has never experienced such sharp income polarities or such

gaping regional disparities. All these factors make for a robust fight in the next elections. To win an absolute majority on its own, the BJP would have to win 50 percent more seats than it currently holds. There is no way it can do this—short of a wave in its favour and its allies' agreement to concede constituencies to it.

The BJP has a limited base, mainly in central and western India. As for the NDA, it reached a saturation point in a number of states where it holds a good amount or majority of seats. It will not be easy to better this performance. The opposition, by contrast, has a much higher chance of improving on its

India's ruling party faces a fierce time at the upcoming polls

1999 scores. However, the opposition cannot win the electoral race unless it can project an alternative set of policies and visions that are of relevance to, and catch the imagination of, a majority of the population. It has yet to work out a common minimum program or manifesto. Nor has the opposition been able to form a single common front. ● (IPS)



ANTOANETA BEZLOVA in BEIJING

China, a nascent space power, has been shying away from accepting US President George W Bush's invitation for space-faring nations to join his country's mission to Mars—and is now making clear that the United States will not be alone in its interplanetary quests. In December, China announced it would embark on one of the most ambitious space programs this year by launching 10 satellites, beginning

development of its lunar probe and preparing for the country's second manned space flight.

After an extended break over Chinese New Year, the training programme of 14 astronauts will resume in March, according to the *Beijing Youth Daily*. It quoted Huang Weifan, director of research at China Astronauts Selection and Training Institute, as saying that the 'Shenzhou 6'—China's spacecraft scheduled for launch next year—would carry two people on board. Chinese

Space race

China is determined to launch its own interplanetary quest

officials have hailed the country's first manned space flight on 15 October last year as a "giant leap" and declared that China's space program was going according to timetable.

"Although the Chinese government has yet to list its moon-probe program as a government-funded project, space experts have made preparations for the project as it is almost certain to be approved," said a Xinhua news agency recently. The government's nod to the programme could come as early as March, when the National People's Congress, or China's Parliament, convenes its annual session.

In December, state media already quoted Sun Laiyan, deputy director of China National Space Administration, as saying that a lunar-probe satellite was scheduled for launch by 2007. An unmanned lunar landing by 2010 will follow it some five years before the deadline envisaged by Bush for the United States to return to the moon.

Under an ambitious scheme also announced in December, Bush wants the US space agency, the National Aeronautic and

Scientific Administration (NASA), to set up a moon base by 2020 and use the mission as a springboard for future manned trips to Mars and beyond. Unveiling his blueprint for space quest in January, Bush invited other countries to participate in the program. "The vision I outline today is a journey, not a race, and I call on other nations to join us on this journey in a spirit of cooperation and friendship," Bush said.

As the third country to send a person in space after Russia and the United States, China clearly ranks high on the list of countries that are aiming for space exploration. But if history is any judge, China may well decide it wants to walk down its own road. Before sending 'taikonaut' Yang Liwei in space last year, 30 years after other nations have sent man in orbit, China rejected cheaper and quicker alternatives to putting a Chinese in orbit. Beijing turned down US President Ronald Reagan's 1984 invitation to launch the first Chinese into space on the US space shuttle and later declined a similar offer from Russian President Boris Yeltsin. ● (IPS)

Castro's Cuba

It's a country that dazzles and disappoints, where one finds miracles and monsters, but no easy answers

COMMENT

Lydia Chavez



In a rehearsal studio, a young Cuban ballet dancer turns through the air, pivoting as though some invisible power has unfurled him in an arc. Then, without pause, he leaps once, twice and I gasp at the height of his *grandes jetés* and then gasp again because his pointed toe is heading right for a *barre*.

Welcome to Cuba, a country that dazzles and disappoints, where one finds miracles and monsters, but no easy answers. Cubans recognise the contradictions as readily as any outsider. Yet even as inflation rises and the 77-year-old dictator tightens Internet access and closes the economic openings that encouraged self-employment in the mid-1990s, it is unlikely that Cubans will turn Castro out before he dies.

The rabidly anti-Castro Cuban exiles clustered in Miami argue that it is fear that holds Cubans back, but that's not true. A visitor in Cuba finds many ready to complain, but the palpable fear and visceral hatred rampant in El Salvador and Chile in the 1980s is absent in today's Cuba. Instead there is a kind of paralysis—born of a mix of loyalty, fear and indoctrination—as they grudgingly wait for Castro to expire.

Unlike many of Latin America's freely elected governments, Castro has actually provided his constituents with public services—and without earning a reputation for corruption.

"All the free education and health care gives a certain balance," said a prominent writer. "Their work is less valuable," he said referring to the pesos Cubans earn in an economy sustained by dollar remittances from the foreign diaspora. But "it's not a total disaster because people have this balance."

So, unlike the East Europeans who overthrew their corrupt political leaders in 1989, and some Latin Americans who did so more recently in Bolivia, Argentina and Ecuador, Cubans have failed to rally against Castro. Yes, Castro jailed 75 independent journalists and others in an April sweep—that is the monster in him. But other dissidents remain free. That is the contradiction.

Moreover, unlike other luxury-loving Latin American leaders, Cuban officials do not flaunt lavish lifestyles. Among Latin American countries, only Chile and Uruguay rate better than Cuba in Transparency International's corruption index. But this could change as dollars become hard to resist and Cubans use them to cut through ridiculous bureaucratic hurdles. Already, the dollar has created a divide in living standards between those who have greenbacks and those who don't.

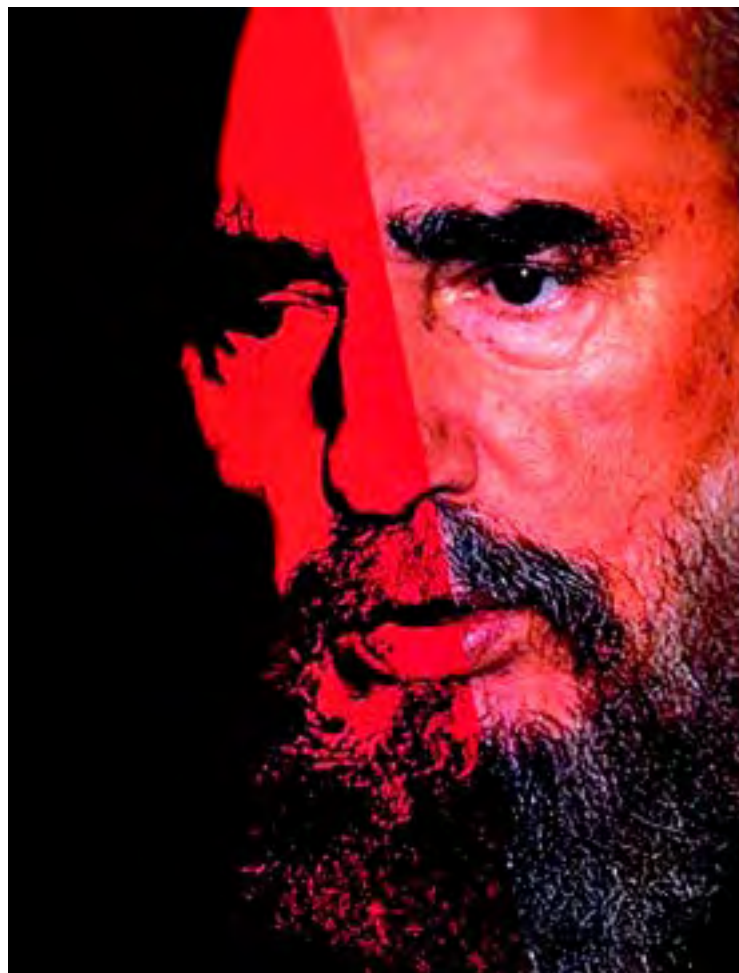
Despite a moribund economy, Castro still delivers what the majority of Latin American residents fail to get—free health care and education and a relatively drug and crime-free environment. With more than 40 percent of Latin America's population living in poverty, Cuba stands out as an example of a country where being

poor does not mean a life of squalor. Even World Bank president James Wolfensohn acknowledged in 2001 that Cuba had done a "great job" on education and health care.

More recently, in discussing the Bank's 2004 report *Making Services Work for Poor People*, officials put Cuba among countries like Sri Lanka, Costa Rica and China that "managed to achieve a level of outcomes in health and education that are extremely favourable." This winter, the Cuban government reinvested some of its income from tourism in upgrading schools that deteriorated in the years following the loss of Soviet aid. "Cubans are still endeared by that," said one Western diplomat.

Amazingly, many Latin America leaders fail to make the connection between reducing poverty and their own popularity. Compare Castro's campaign to improve schools to a poverty reduction program waged by Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party during a six-year period in the 1990's.

Mexico spent 1.2 percent of GDP per year to provide basic services to communities in Mexico. According to Santa Deverajan, the director of the World Bank's *World Development Report 2004*, some studies showed that the program could have reduced poverty by as much as 64 percent. Instead, the money was doled out to municipalities based on political loyalty, so poverty fell by only 3



percent. "If they had just given it out equally to the entire Mexican population," Deverajan says, "it would have reduced poverty by 13 percent."

Examples like this abound in Latin America, but it is a mistake for Castro to think that Latin America is the competition. Cubans don't think it is. Their touchstones are Madrid, Paris and New York. An educated professional with a wife and two children takes a breath when he recalls a trip to Spain. "It's hard to explain how I felt when I went there. It wasn't like another world or another planet; it was like another galaxy." With family in Spain, he could immigrate, but he doesn't consider that option seriously. "This is where I want to live, but 5 percent of the way things are run has got to change. They blame everything on

the embargo. We have a self-imposed embargo. We limit ourselves."

More precisely, Castro limits Cubans. They want to breathe, but life with a patriarchal tyrant can be suffocating. Younger Cubans often sound like well-educated teenagers with parents who are too strict. They want to travel, publish what they want, dance when and where they want and experience the world as Castro experienced it.

"It's not my fight," says one 28-year-old Cuban, referring to the political battle of communism versus capitalism that keeps him trapped on the island. "I'm a new generation. I want to see as they had the chance to see." ● (© Project Syndicate)

Lydia Chavez, a Professor at the University of California at Berkeley, is now editing a book about Cuba.

Money flow for water challenged

The European Union has come under fire from NGOs over a new initiative to fund water resources. The European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union (EU), adopted a proposal to allocate \$1.2 billion to improve access to water and sanitation for the Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) bloc. The group comprises 79 countries. Forty of these are considered to be among the least developed countries (LDC). They are economically vulnerable and heavily dependent on EU aid.

The Commission's proposal follows, in part, a commitment made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 to deliver on the millennium development goal of halving the number of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. About 1.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and 2.4 billion people to sanitation. Despite progress towards these goals, the Commission says funds remain scarce. Officials say a further \$52.2 billion is needed to meet water and sanitation targets.

The Commission had launched the ACP Water Fund last May, but the proposal was rejected by the European Council, which brings together the heads of state or government of the 15 member states of the EU and the president of the European Commission. The council was divided over the source of the funds. The source remains controversial. Money for the new initiative will be taken from reserve funds of the EDF. ACP countries receive EU development aid through this fund. In 2000 member states allocated \$15.8 billion to the fund over five years, but kept \$1.2 billion in reserve pending a mid-term review of the EDF. The review is expected later this year.

The Commission says the new resources being provided through use of this reserve fund can promote new initiatives, provide technical assistance, build research and management capacity and "provide the flexible source of funding which is often the missing link in financing of sustainable water and sanitation-related programs." But civil society groups here say the Commission's initiative will harm ACP countries. ● (IPS)



JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON

If the 'war on terror' is beginning to look increasingly like the Cold War, then President George W Bush's fiscal year 2005 foreign-aid request will not change that impression. While Bush proposes to increase funding for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) and anti-AIDS money for African and Caribbean countries, he is also cutting funds for other key humanitarian and development accounts. At the same time, the president is asking Congress to increase military and security assistance by more than \$1 billion. Those two categories, which include anti-drug aid and proliferation categories, would make up nearly one-third of all US foreign aid under Bush's request, roughly the same percentage of total foreign aid when the Cold War reached its height during the 1980s.

Under Bush's proposals, credits for foreign militaries to buy US weapons and equipment would increase by some \$700 million to nearly \$5 billion, the highest total in

Cold War cast US foreign aid budget takes a familiar route

well over a decade. Under his plan, military spending, which already constitutes roughly one-half of the world's total military expenditures, would rise by some seven percent, to \$402 billion in FY 2005, which begins 1 October.

That figure does not include an anticipated \$50 billion more that the administration is expected to request to fund military and related operations in Iraq and Afghanistan later in the year. The projected deficit for FY 2005 now stands at some \$521 billion, an amount so great that even the normally deferential International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned recently the United States is approaching a fiscal crisis that threatens global financial stability.

Countries considered critical in the war on terror will see significant increases in credits and aid, some of it from the Economic Support Fund (ESF), a category of security assistance used during the Cold War to give support to key geo-political allies. ESF will increase by more than 20 percent to more than \$2.5 billion if Bush's proposal is approved. Pakistan will get nearly \$700 million under the plan, while aid to Afghanistan is slated at \$1.2 billion.

The increases in military and ESF funding will come largely at the expense of humanitarian and development assistance, whose core programs will be reduced by about \$400 million in 2005. The new request also proposes only \$200 million in FY 2005 for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Congress last year approved \$550 million to the fund despite the administration's objections. ● (IPS)

Jump potential

Where diseases are concerned, the unexpected will happen

ANALYSIS
David Cavanagh



Scientists long anticipated that an influenza virus will spread—as now appears to be happening in Asia—from wild birds to humans, causing a pandemic. But few predicted last year's SARS epidemic, a pneumonia caused by a *coronavirus*. Prior to 2003, coronaviruses ranked very low on the scale of important human diseases, mostly being associated with the common cold. But we have long known that coronaviruses can cause dreadful diseases in domestic animals. We simply haven't learned our lesson.

Indeed, events of the last couple of decades—the AIDS viruses transferring from monkeys to man, followed by their global spread, being just one example—should have convinced us that, where diseases are

we trap, enclose, and trade wild animals, such as civet cats, which seems to be the scenario that led to SARS in humans. When a virus has been associated with its host for a very long time, it mutates to a form that grows well without killing its host, which would be a pointless outcome from an evolutionary standpoint. A well-understood example is that of influenza viruses in wild fowl, where the virus causes infections that are hard to detect.

But if an influenza virus jumps from, say, ducks to chickens, there may be lethal consequences. The virus is not well adjusted to the chicken, and some strains of the virus “go berserk.” It is possible that the SARS coronavirus does not cause serious disease in its natural, wild animal hosts. Our problem arose when we enabled the virus to move from its normal home into us, by “farming” civet cats and other animals.



serious. On occasion, however, the virus mutates to a lethal form that can kill almost 100 percent of its victims. It is a highly virulent influenza virus such as this that is devastating chickens in parts of Asia.

That influenza virus has also “jumped” from the chickens to those who look after them, killing some people. The influenza viruses established in humans for several decades originated from bird viruses. The chronic fear of health authorities is that, by chance, another avian influenza virus will mutate and spread from person to person to spawn a global pandemic.



concerned, the unexpected will happen. After all, the “jumping” of viruses from wild animals to humans is more common than we like to think.

All types of virus strains or variants exist, somewhat akin to dogs existing as different breeds. Veterinarians and farmers have long known of a coronavirus that can kill 90 percent or more of young pigs. Less well known is the fact that cats and dogs are infected by a coronavirus that can also cause disease in pigs.

The cat coronavirus can cause lethal abdominal disease in cats, while some strains of the chicken coronavirus cause kidney disease rather than just bronchitis. There is simply no room for complacency where viruses or bacteria, for that matter, are concerned.

Evolution, whether of microbes or humans, involves pushing at the margins, going a little bit further than yesterday or last year, driven by the need to find additional sources of food. Humans, unlike other creatures, may also *desire* more of everything. Whatever the reason, we invade other creatures' space by, say, cutting down forests.

As we come close to other animals, their viruses come closer to us. The outcome can be the same if

Many human viral diseases have not been with us very long, perhaps only 10-20,000 years. Most probably, the viruses came from the wild animals in whose environment we were encroaching. In other words, the SARS outbreak was not a novel event. Chinese researchers have detected antibodies to SARS-like viruses in 2 percent of people from whom blood samples were taken in 2001, a year before the disease first occurred. Many animal traders tested in 2003 in a market in the epicentre of the SARS outbreak also had the antibodies, again with no history of disease. This shows that the SARS virus has jumped species, from animals to man, on other occasions, with benign consequences.

The difference in late 2002 was, perhaps, that people were infected with a variant that “went berserk” and grew too extensively in humans. It was bad luck. It is also possible that, again by chance, a benign SARS virus from a civet cat mutated *after* it infected people, becoming highly virulent. Both aspects of this scenario—a virus jumping to a strange host and then mutating to a devastating form—are familiar. Waterfowl commonly spread influenza viruses to chickens, although the outcome usually is not

Human SARS might never have spread to the extent that it did (killing 800 people and devastating economies) if the problem had been openly acknowledged, with the World Health Organization involved from the outset. Similar failings have exacerbated the consequences of today's bird-origin influenza epidemic in Vietnam, Thailand and elsewhere. Some countries that have the greatest reservoirs of viruses with “jump potential” are ill-equipped politically, socially and institutionally for the world to have confidence in them.

Humans will continue to push against our existing boundaries, whether out of necessity, curiosity, pleasure, or greed, so more virus jumps will undoubtedly occur. We must trust the WHO and its associates to come to our rescue, as it did so admirably with SARS. But those involved in human and veterinary medicine must no longer remain aloof from one another. Recent events have made crystal clear what we already knew—that human and animal viruses are not mutually exclusive. ●

(© Project Syndicate)

David Cavanagh is the head of Coronavirus Group at the Institute for Animal Health, UK.

Nano divide

It's no small matter

STEPHEN LEAHY in BROOKLIN, CANADA

Research in nanotechnology is thriving in developing countries but high-profile criticism of the new process from the likes of Prince Charles and Greenpeace will hurt investment and threatens to create a “nano divide” between rich and poor countries, says a new report. Despite its fantastic sounding name, the technology is actually very practical for developing countries, where existing methods of treating sanitation, for example, do not actually work well or are very expensive, says Abdallah Daar, from the University of Toronto's Joint Centre for Bioethics. “Nanotechnology could be better and cheaper, as well as being



a profitable industry for countries in the South,” said Daar, one of the co-authors of the report published in the UK journal *Nanotechnology*.

Nanotechnology refers to the manipulation of matter at the level of atoms and molecules. Where biotechnology involves manipulating genes, the basic units of the genetic code, nanotechnology could potentially use atoms to build a gene. Over the past four years, the United States has invested several billion dollars to develop the technology. The market for nano products and services is predicted to reach \$1 trillion by 2015, according to the US National Science Foundation.

Countries like China, India and South Korea have well-established nano research centres and commercial products on the market. Thailand, Philippines, South Africa, Brazil and Chile are not far behind, with their governments funding the new technology. China is testing a nanotech bone scaffold in 26 patients. India plans to use quantum dots in a fast, low-cost diagnostic tool for treating tuberculosis. India is also commercialising a US-patented “nano particle” drug delivery system, while Brazil hopes its “nano magnets” can be used to clean up oil spills.

But if calls for a moratorium on nano products by Greenpeace and Canada's ETC Group are heeded, it could mean the end for nano in the South. “Just because ‘nano materials’ are small doesn't mean they're safe,” says Pat Mooney, ETC's executive director. In 2002 the group began a campaign to ban commercial production of new products from nanotechnology until more research is done on the risks.

Regulatory agencies in the United States and Europe have begun looking at the issue and to fund research. In the next few weeks, new studies will be released saying some nanoparticles do pose a danger, says Mooney. Daar and his co-authors acknowledge that nanotech could pose some risks. But they worry activists' “fear-mongering” will result in a debate raging over the risks to the North, while any potential benefits to people in the South will be ignored. Mooney's group plans to make a formal proposal for an international convention on the evaluation of new technologies at the Convention on Biological Diversity in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in February. ● (IPS)

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Solutions and responses



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Sher Bahadur Deuba in *Deshantar*, 1 February

देशान्तरसाप्ताहिक

The king's recent remarks that appeared in his interview with *Time* fanned the flames that razed the country. He appears to be in no mood to reconcile with the political parties of the dissolved House of Representatives or to provide a solution to the current crisis. He shows no indication that he is ready to correct his unconstitutional move. The king seems to think he does not have enough power in a multiparty democracy and the present constitution.

I don't think he wants to be an absolute monarch. But the situation doesn't allow him to be an active monarch either. If their words are to be believed, the Indian government and leaders of the political parties are for a constitutional monarchy and the multiparty system.

I have always been a well-wisher of the king: as prime minister, I tried to accommodate many of his interests. I was criticised for doing that. The king desired the prestige that came with his monarchy. I gave utmost importance to that but his real desire is now apparent—to become an active king. I didn't realise that till I was sacked.

The Maoists have not accepted the existence of other political parties. Even if the latter showed their willingness to deal with the rebels, the Maoists continue to physically attack people associated with the parties. They have not shown their commitment to democracy, so there is no way we can join hands with them. We'd rather go with the king. But that alliance is not going to be at the cost of the parties' principles and values. But if the Maoists show they are committed to democracy and give up violence, we could join them too.

The king doesn't gain by blaming the parties. After all, we are Nepalis. In a democracy, it is common to see the positive and negative aspects of political leaders. The people can punish them. Some say there have been no leaders in Nepal. So, should we import our leaders? We make mistakes, but they can be corrected.

Article 127 was meant to clear hurdles, not add complications. Constitutional experts and drafters of the constitution have reasons to say that the king violated that constitutional provision when he made his move on 4 October 2002. True, I failed to hold elections on time. I accept my mistake. All the parties had recommended that the elections be postponed so I had little choice in the matter.

I am not sorry for dissolving the House of Representatives. That was my compulsion. I consulted Girija Prasad Koirala on extending the state of emergency and he had no problem with it at the time. I also brought the issue up in an all-party meeting, where again it was met with no opposition. But when the proposal was registered in the parliament, they demanded its withdrawal. How can national security be treated like that? Should they not have thought that the move would bring the morale of security agencies down? Moreover, the ruling party should have helped the government. Instead, it created obstacles. The dissolution of the parliament was my own decision. The king was not involved.

During my recent meeting with the king, I proposed three ideas to resolve the present crisis. I told him that Girija Prasad Koirala was in favour of the restoration of parliament and that five parties are for an all-party government under the leadership of Madhab Kumar Nepal. I said that although my party's primary demand is the reinstatement of my government, I have no problems if the king agrees to the reinstatement of an all-party government. The king didn't react. He just listened.

Bad medicine

Rajdhani, 31 January

राजधानी

Sub-standard drugs are being sold throughout the kingdom and it could risk the health of Nepalis, warns the Department of Drug Administration (DDA). During an investigation of pharmacies in Narayanghat, Butwal and Krishnanagar, drug inspectors found sub-standard medicines were being sold that could even cause fatalities. The investigation started after the department received complaints of ineffective drugs being sold by Indian companies that were not authorised by the DDA to supply medicines in Nepal. According to procedure, foreign pharmaceutical companies have to register with the DDA for permission to sell drugs in Nepal. Of the 6,000 brands, more than half are imported. Fake and substandard drugs come in through the open border. The latest investigation uncovered 11 unregistered companies involved in illegally supplying towns along the Nepal-India border. These drugs may have also penetrated the hill areas.

Dying of hunger

Rajdhani, 1 February

राजधानी

KALIKOT – In Khalagaun and Padamghat, the state food depot has not supplied rice in four years. The men have all migrated to India and those left behind—women, the aged and children—are weak with hunger. The women can't travel because of the weather and restricted movement imposed by the Maoists. "We are gradually losing all the food and water in our villages," says Sulchina Shah. Till a few months ago, there was a small grocery shop in the village where locals could buy food at reasonable prices and on credit. Now they

have to walk for three hours to reach the nearest bazar where the cheapest rice costs about Rs 40 per kg. The food shortage is so acute that the women hide in their neighbour's house to avoid feeding guests. There is danger of famine in 14 VDCs if the food shortage worsens. Nanakali Malla's husband drowned while fishing, and now her family of seven faces starvation. "For many nights we have gone to bed hungry," says Malla. A few years ago, the local women were able to earn cash by selling land and cattle but the the rebels prohibited these transactions. About 4,000 families from 30 VDCs in the district have already migrated to India. The remainder lives in misery and terror. The Food Depot Corporation has been trying to distribute subsidised rice, wheat and maize but the Maoists created obstacles. The local women say if something is not done quickly, they will all die of hunger.

No investigation

Spacetime, 3 February

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक

Just when the CIAA began investigating possible corruption in the Employment Promotion Commission (EPC), the government began the process of dissolving the body. The corruption watchdog started its investigation after obtaining proof that the EPC was involved in a corruption scam for a training program worth more than Rs 20 million. An official with the CIAA said that the commission had examined the case and was preparing to file a case against some officials of the EPC.

No sooner did the news of the CIAA investigation come out, the government started the process of dissolving the EPC that has Prime Minister Thapa as its chairman. The EPC had reached an

agreement with Unlimited New Media Company to train 1,500 youth for medical transcription. The commission was supposed to pay Rs 25,000 per youth for nine months of training. Although the private company shut shop in six months, EPC made the full payment of more than Rs 20 million.

New strategy

Nepal Samacharpatra, 3 February

CHITWAN – The five agitating political parties have a new policy to focus the movement in 10 districts that are directly connected to Kathmandu. Their strategy is to 'hit the highways'. A meeting of district committee chairmen in Chitwan decided that the movement would mainly be centred along the Prithvi and Tribhuban Rajpath. Chairmen of Chitwan, Gorkha, Tanahun, Dhading, Kaski, Nawalparasi and Lamjung concluded with a 19-point common agenda. They hinted bandhs may be announced in these districts. The district leaders of five political parties have decided to forward their advice to the central body, suggesting a 10-day general strike to 'thrash regression once and for all'. According to Devi Gyawali, district secretary of CPN-UML, motorcycle rallies, mass meetings and rallies will be organised alongside bandhs. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

Homeless

Kantipur, 1 February

कान्तिपुर

NEW DELHI – Nepali children are fleeing their villages to escape conflict. More than 100 children who don't have proper addresses and names of parents have ended up in orphanages in the Indian



Protestors and Prime Minister House on fire: National pride Hand: Foreign investment in media

राजधानी *Rajdhani*, 1 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"It's appalling that student leaders are trying to dictate terms to political party heads."

– Hiranyalal Shrestha, independent politician, in *Janbhawana*, 2 February

capital. “I came from Taruk district,” says 14-year-old Rahul who can’t remember the names of his parents. Manoj, another child, says he too came from Nepal but he does not know the name of his village or how he came to New Delhi. “So many requests come to us to return these children back to their villages, but without proper introductions and addresses, we have difficulties releasing them from the orphanages,” said Durga Prasad Aryal from the Migrant Nepali Friends Group. In the past year, the organisation has helped 60 women and children to return but lack of documents and proper introduction makes it difficult to get authorisation from the courts to repatriate the children.

The organisation recently rescued about 45 Nepali children from Apollo Circus and sent them back home to Nepal. “It takes months to clear the legal process and produce documents for their release,” says Aryal. At times, when finding evidence of their whereabouts is difficult, UNIFEM helps to hand the children over through ABC Nepal, a Kathmandu-based NGO.

1,500 orphans
.....
Rajdhani, 31 January

राजधानी

Babita Rawal, a four-year-old from Humla, is waiting for her mother. She doesn’t know that the Maoists killed her after she refused to pay them a donation. In Jajarkot, six-year-old Sinam Acharya’s mother was shot to death by the army for violating the curfew. She had stepped out to fetch some water.

There are many Babitas and Sinams in Nepal today. The conflict is an orphan factory. The UN has introduced a convention on child rights to make the state accountable for the protection and security of children, but in Nepal there is no sign of the government doing much for them. Both the



state and the Maoists use children: they are often forced to work as message bearers, informers and even bear arms. The state has used young children as informants.

Since the ‘People’s War’ began, about 300 children have lost their lives. More than a 1,000 are disabled because they were caught in crossfire or stepped on landmines planted by both sides, according to a report from Child Development Society. More than 1,500 children have been orphaned, over 10,000 left homes and migrated to towns and to India. About 70 percent of the schools in the Maoist affected areas are closed. Despite constant calls to declare children as zones of peace, the government has not given any direction to prevent them from being party to this conflict. The least it could do is declare schools as zones of peace.

EU pressure
.....
Excerpts from editorial in *Kantipur*, 4 February

कान्तिपुर

Pressure from the European Union (EU) to improve the human rights situation in the country makes it clear that the international community is closely monitoring the rapidly deteriorating situation here. Observers have taken this in the light of the diplomatic community’s strong support for the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The memorandum of understanding prepared by NHRC during the ceasefire between the

government and the Maoists was meant to guide the conduct of both fighting sides. It included human rights instruments that the government has signed. The Maoist rebels had also pledged that they would show their support and assistance to the proposal presented by the commission. We repeatedly hear or sometimes even come across an incident where even the minimum level of human rights have been violated or breached. Citizens are denied the right to live their life with self-respect and dignity. It is important to protect such basic rights as education, health and the freedom to move unhindered. Freedom of expression should be there without any prejudice. If these are not respected, then the country will slide further. The EU has stressed the importance of an all-party government, immediate parliamentary elections and improvement in law and order. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

Unhealthy journalism

Deshantar, 1 February

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

The publishing business of daily newspapers that has flourished under multiparty democracy has suddenly become an unhealthy competition. This is evident in the row between APCA which publishes *The Himalayan Times* (THT) and Kantipur Publications. The Nepal Media Society (NMS), made up of Nepali publishers, has given its full support to Kantipur publications. It has targeted THT for publishing a misleading article about Buddha being born in India, thus hurting the national sentiments of the Nepali people. But it seems the real issue is over the low price of THT and its sister publication *Annapurna Post*. It is undeniable that these two are the largest selling dailies. In terms of circulation, THT is regarded as the top selling English language daily newspaper due to it’s price and has little to do with news, quality or design. Nepalis own less than five percent of APCA’s share, which has been dogged by controversy even before THT was launched.

The Himalayan Times, initially sold at Rs 2, dropped to Rs 1 after *The Kathmandu Post* lowered its price from Rs 4 to Rs 1.50. The fight between these two publication houses has embroiled student unions and political parties. The issue has already become politicised, what with the public burning of THT and *Annapurna Post*. The Nepal Media Society justifies their actions, saying political parties were responsible for acting against ‘anti-national’ broadsheets. APCA, however, believes that Kantipur Publications is behind the entire exercise.

Meanwhile, Kantipur has complained that the government has not taken any legal action despite such a national protest against these two newspapers. Whatever the reason, this kind of unhealthy competition could destroy a newspaper industry that had just started flourishing in Nepal. It is natural to protest against a publishing house whose finances are not transparent. Readers want APCA to be clearer about its financial dealings and Kantipur Publications to compete in the market in a healthy manner.

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Armistice and after



As the Second World War ends, ex-British Gurkha Bharati Gurung, 92, continues his recollection of the period after the war: the bounty on Hitler, India's independence, the division of the Gurkha army and later, his involvement in a Gurkha welfare office in Nepal. Bharati Gurung's story is part of the testimony of Gurkha soldiers, translated from the Nepali *Lahurey ka Katha* by Dev Bahadur Thapa for *Nepali Times*.



After the armistice it was proclaimed that whoever caught Hitler would be offered crores in reward. A handful of us were selected to capture Hitler. To our consternation, we found out that all German survivors of the war looked like Hitler. A number of them were caught and questioned. They turned out to be fake Hitlers. Later, we found out he had already committed suicide.

Subash Chandra Bose had a different idea from those of Gandhi and Nehru. They preferred a gradual, peaceful approach, Bose was for driving them out. At that moment the Japanese had captured three Gurkha battalions and made them prisoners of war in Singapore. Bose joined hands with some Gurkhas to fight alongside the Japanese. So, Gurkhas were fighting in both the British and the Japanese armies against each other! The Japanese continued fighting in Asia even after the German surrender.

We came back to India on leave as soon as the war in Greece was over. We danced and sang on the ship on the way back since the war had come to a close. Since we had no madal we resorted to beating tins throughout our sea journey. It took three full days and nights to reach Karachi. In those days Pakistan did not exist. It took another three days and nights for us to arrive at Dehradun by train.

We went home on three months' leave, but before that we had to go through a purification ceremony in which we had to gulp cow urine three times a day for seven days and were allowed only one meal a day. We gave a quarter or half a rupee to the priest who gave us cow urine. The Rana regime of the day required people to observe the ceremony. I wasn't yet married. My wife is still here with me.

There were several generations in the army. I have seen a grandfather, father and grandson serving in the same unit. The grandfather was mess sergeant, father a sergeant and grandson was in training. It was now time for the British to leave India and riots erupted between Hindus and Muslims. Hindus started killing Muslims and vice-versa. It was a war of a more difficult nature. Hindus suspected that British were siding with the Muslims and made the British their target. We patrolled the streets with machine guns and grenades. The riots in Bombay were quelled.

Then came the moment of dividing Gurkha troops into British and Indian regiments. Under that arrangement six regiments were to stay with India and the rest four would go

with the British. There were two generals—one for the British and the other for India. There were instances when one brother remained with the British whereas the other was in an Indian regiment. I fell in the lot of the British and went to serve in Malaya and Singapore. No sooner did we reach there, war broke out against the bandits. There were huge stocks of weapons abandoned by the Japanese and the British. Even Chinese were adversaries in that guerrilla war.



Life was full of hardship in the jungle. The place was infested with malaria besides wild animals, serpents and scorpions. The war lasted nine years and troops from New Zealand, Fiji, Australia and Britain took part. The Fijians were bigger in size than others, the size of their boots were much bigger. They had rendered much help to Gurkhas, so it was ordered from above to send them a suitable present.

What could be the present from Gurkhas other than the khukuri? I had been assigned from the army to present them with a khukuri made of silver. They showed us exceeding respect.

While fighting a few of us made a pact that those who lived would go to the homes of dead comrades and console their family. Harka Bahadur Thapa of Gorkha, Shankar Deb Thapa of Palpa and myself pledged to do that. In the long run, I survived but those two laid down their lives in the Greek war. On my return to Nepal, I visited Harka Bahadur's family home in Gorkha. He was very recently married and had no children. His mother was very old and as soon she heard the news she wept. Later, the village people came and consoled her saying not one but so many people all over the world lost their lives.

Moved, I came up with a proposal to establish a Gurkha welfare office. Some servicemen gave a month's salary. Subsequently a group of army personnel accompanied by top class band toured Singapore, Malaya and Canada to raise funds. The largest amount was collected in Canada. I served for seven years in the welfare office after my retirement from the army. My experience in the welfare program made me face situations where there was no one to collect pensions. In one instance all three brothers were killed in the war. None had married and after the demise of their parents no one was left to collect the money. In another family in Bhirs in Gorkha, all five brothers were killed: three brothers in the Second World War and two in the jungles of Malaya in 1948.

BIGBEN



It's raining rhinos!

Bigben

Cartoon joint venture

Bigben is the symbol of the cooperation between Biggyan, an 8th grader from Chitwan and Bernard, a travel writer and expedition leader. Bernard taught art in Europe, and drew street scenes wherever he went. Last year Bernard taught Biggyan the basics in watercolours and this year they started doing cartoons, some mildly satirical.

"I realised that Nepal has very few creative cartoonists," says Bernard. "I was dismayed at seeing your national papers sporting mostly poor American cartoons." Bernard hopes the cartoons will instill self-confidence in Biggyan and be a vehicle for his creativity. Welcome to the world of Demo the yellow rhino, the long-awaited Nepal tourism mascot, and his other friends.

To be serialised in this space in *Nepali Times* every week.

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Golf for beginners I

Free instruction for those who always wanted to take up golf, but didn't know where to start

Don't believe the propaganda, golf is actually simple and easy to play. You place a small hard ball on the ground, and hit it with a long club. In as few hits as possible, try and get it into a cup in a small hole in the ground marked by a flag.

A standard golf course has 18 holes, usually between 100-600 yards long, each with a tee where the first hit is made, a fairway of grass, and a smooth grass green where the hole is located. Such a simple game would soon be unfashionable. Who would aspire to be good at something so easy? Thus exotic terms have been added to make the game appear more glamorous.

Here is a guide so the uninitiated can enlighten themselves and understand the mysterious terms used by the golfing fraternity to make this simple game appear so complex.

Basic terms for a golf course's features:

Tee – The starting point, the beginning of the hole, where you hit your first of many shots to try and get the ball into the cup. This is a flat area identified by two markers spaced a few yards apart. There are different tees on each hole for men and women of different playing abilities. Nowadays each hole has four sets of tees, the furthest from the hole being the black tee markers for men's championships and professionals, slightly closer to the hole—blue markers for normal men players (that is, if any male golfer can be considered normal), white markers for seniors, men's beginners, and better juniors and ladies, and the closest to the hole red markers for ladies and beginner juniors.



Fairway – A well manicured, closely mown area between the tee and the green, usually between 30 to 60 yards wide, and down the center of the direction you should be hitting the ball. Fairway grass is cut quite short and kept in good condition to make play easier by rewarding a straight shot from the tee. The reward is a golf ball which sits nicely on top of the short grass and is easier to hit with control.

Rough – Less well maintained areas of longer grass on either side of the fairway, placed with the intention of making shots that were not hit on the fairway more difficult to play, as the ball sinks down into the longer grass.

Bunker – A pit filled with sand. It is much more difficult to play a shot from a bunker, so these are fiendish obstacles placed in strategic areas to make the game more challenging and difficult.

Hazard – Hazards include water bodies, ditches, drains and bunkers which are again placed to make the game more challenging, forcing a golfer to take into account strategies of avoiding these hazards. If you cannot hit your ball out of a hazard, you play from outside the hazard and add a one shot penalty to your score for that hole.

Out of Bounds – Outside the allowed area of play. For example, if you hit your ball into the neighbouring rice paddy field. In this case you have to add two shots to your score for that hole and hit the ball again from the same place.

Green – A flatter, smoother area, with very short evenly cut grass that allows the ball to be rolled towards and hopefully into the cup placed in the ground. This cup is 4.5 inches in diameter and is marked by thin pole placed in its center topped with a flag.

When you've finally managed to repeatedly hit the ball from the tee and get it into the cup, then play is completed for that particular hole.

Round of Golf - You must play 18 holes to complete one round of golf. Each hole has all the features revealed above, and generally a full length Golf course has 18 holes. Smaller courses have 9 holes which are played twice to complete the requisite magical number of eighteen. (To be continued in this space next week.)

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Head Golf Professional at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com



TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya

Reign in Spain



A new documentary chronicles Dutch footballer Johan Cruyff's legendary status in Barcelona

GEOFFREY MACNAB

In early 1970s Catalonia, the resentment against General Franco was profound and deep. One of the few public places where the people could speak their own language was the Nou Camp, the Barcelona football stadium. That was why the arrival of the Dutch footballer Johan Cruyff to play for Barcelona in August 1973 was treated almost as if it was a second coming.

"This gaunt, gangly little fellow who smoked like a chimney gave us back our pride," says an elderly Catalan interviewed in Ramon Gieling's new documentary, *Johan Cruyff: At a Given Moment*.

A series of coincidences helped cement the Dutchman's relationship with the Catalan public. Cruyff's wife was heavily pregnant. The birth was induced a few days early, so he could play in the most important game of all, against Real Madrid at the Bernabeu. Largely thanks to Cruyff, Barcelona won 5-0 in a game that even now few Catalans can talk about without getting goosebumps.

Then, simply because he and his wife liked the name, they decided to call their new son Jordi. This, it turned out, was the name of the patron saint of Catalonia and was forbidden under Franco's laws. When Cruyff tried to register the birth, the clerks told him he should call his son Jorge. He refused. As Jordi had been born in Holland, the authorities were powerless to stop Cruyff using the name. "But he was not aware of the immense political meaning of the name," Gieling says.

At a Given Moment is not a conventional sports documentary. Although the film ends with a long interview with the footballer, Gieling's real focus is on the Catalan people who are invited to share their favourite Cruyff moment.

The film opens with Cruyff in shirt, trousers and loafers kicking around a ball on a patch of grass high in the mountains. He tells the kid in goal he is going to blast the ball, hits it and it spirals off into the sky. We then see it bouncing

down the road all the way back to Barcelona.

Even today, if Cruyff makes the most banal remark, it's treated by the Catalan people as if it's a Delphic utterance. Gieling insists that there is still a naivete about Cruyff and speculates that his humility is attributable to his background. He was 12-years-old when his father died. His mother was forced to work, cleaning the locker rooms at Ajax.

In the mid-1990s, the relationship with Barcelona soured. He was sacked as trainer. The defeats and setbacks lend pathos to his story. Cruyff now lives in the hills above Barcelona and still doesn't speak a word of Catalan. His gift as a footballer was that he mastered the art of being in the right place at the right time. ● (© The Guardian)



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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, a man with a poatee is a hero.)



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Next Change: Herojig finds Barnes & Nobles book store in Thamel, and considers opening up his own StarbucksTM coffee shop in Dilli Bazaar.

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Bungadeo Jatra** Paintings by Sharada Chitrakar till 15 February at Siddhartha Art Gallery, BaberMahel Revisited, 4218048
- ❖ **Landscapes, people and places of Ghandruk village** etchings and wood carvings by Caroline Coode and Elaine Marshall till 10 February at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat. 4428549
- ❖ **Almost Spring** Hand-woven Dhaka exhibition, 11AM-4PM on 8 February at Rita's Garden, Patan Dhoka. 10 percent discount.
- ❖ **Sadhus: The Great Renouncers** Photographs by Thomas Kelly from 13-29 February at Indigo Gallery, Naxal.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Discovering Buddhism** *Following the Buddha: The Four Noble Truths* 7-8 February Details: 4249270 Email: hbmcmos.com.np
- ❖ **Rox Bar 3rd Anniversary Party** 7 February dance 2PM till 2AM. Free Entrance. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha
- ❖ **Self Reflexology For Your Feet** 10AM-12PM on 8 February. Above Everest Bookstore at Babar Mahal Revisited. Buddha's Feet, 4425931
- ❖ **Aarohan Theatre Group** presents Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls House* at Sama Natak Ghar, Old Baneshwar. Weekends from 31 January till 14 March. 4466956
- ❖ **Broadway comes to Patan Dhoka** American singer Alison Sibley performs at Yala Maya Kendra at 5PM on 10 February. Call for passes: 5522113, 2110200

MUSIC

- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz every Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **Drummer's Circle**, percussion evening, 7PM on 20 January, Entry Rs 150. All at Moksh, Club Hardic Pulchowk, 5528703

FOOD

- ❖ **Love at the Jazz Bar** Wine and five course menu on 14 February. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** BBQ lunch with live music Saturdays and Sundays. The Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999
- ❖ **Valentine's Day Special** candlelit evening at Dwarika's Hotel on 14 February. Rs 2,999 per couple. 4479488
- ❖ **Raclette and Fondue** Traditional Swiss table cooking at the Chimney 6:30 PM onwards at the Hotel Yak and Yeti, Kathmandu. 4248999
- ❖ **Cupid's Spell by the Pond** Dinner, a bottle of wine (for couples) and dance through a silver themed 14 February at 1905, Kantipath. Couples: Rs 1,200. Single: Rs 700. 4225272



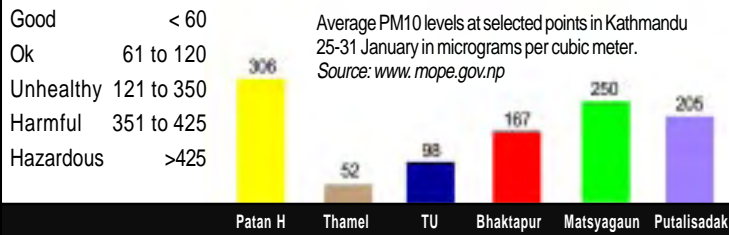
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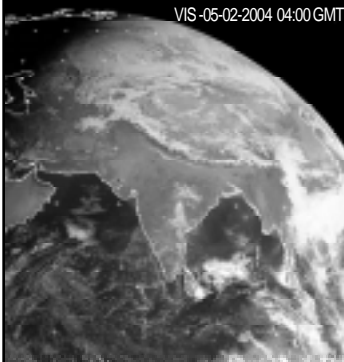


Most of the air we breathed last week was in the "unhealthy" category. No surprises there. In Putali Sadak, Patan Hospital and Thamel, the concentration of small particles of dust less than 10 micros (PM10) were at levels that anywhere else in the world would be considered unbreathable. If you breathe you die, if you don't you die. The bigger particles come from roadside dust, but the finer more harmful ones come from diesel emissions and the smoke stacks of brick kilns on the city's outskirts. Unless we do something about them, we'll be filling our lungs with these particles.



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-05-02-2004 04:00 GMT



As this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows, the Indo-Gangetic fog is now shrinking bringing some sunshine to the tarai and inner-tarai valleys. The hills and mountains have glorious sunshine, and this pattern will continue during the weekend and coming week since there are no major westerly fronts on the horizon. Temperature is set to climb by a notch with the winds from the south. However, this will also bring in the haze that will obscure the sun somewhat. Frosty mornings for Kathmandu with hazy sunshine and breezy afternoons.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



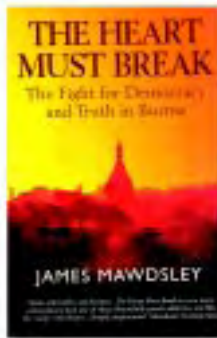
BOOKWORM

The Heart Must Break: The Fight for Democracy and Truth in Burma

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Within just 10 hours of entering Burma and handing out pro-democracy letters, James Mawdsley was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment. Undaunted, he used his time in prison to challenge and defy the regime's lawless assumption of power. He endured torture, beatings, hunger strikes and over a year in solitary confinement. This is the compelling account of his four years in and out of Burma.



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

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

The journey has ended, and what a ride it's been. The three-picture *Lord of the Rings* epic is now complete after three quick years, and it seems like a whirlwind. *Return* isn't just a triumph—it's also a celebration. This film is everything a fan could want and possibly more. For three-plus hours, it entertains, entralls and awes. Its special-effects artistry is astonishing, and its story races to a rousing finish whose finale puts other trilogies to shame. Without spilling any beans, be advised that it's the kind of payoff that makes you joyous to be a film fan—or could reawaken the fan that's been dormant within you after too many overheated Hollywood tamashas.



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HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDAY

DIFFERENT FACES: A dancer removes his mask after the religious procession for peace organised in the capital on Wednesday.



FLAG BEARERS: Nepali students in Pune, India at the recently organised week-long "Nepal Festival" to promote Nepali culture and heritage.



KIRAN PANDAY

GUARD DUTY: Soldiers patrol the empty street in front of Singha Darbar during the Valley bandh called by the five agitating parties on Monday.



KIRAN PANDAY

TRAVELLING LIGHT: Ricky Day Angrela (r) and Alain Honeyborene (l) land in Kathmandu on Tuesday, in the course of their microlight world tour to celebrate the 100 years of aviation. They will be flying over Pokhara this weekend.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

BIRTHDAY PARTY: Deep Shrestha performs at a tribute to Nepali music legends at NTV's 19th anniversary celebrations on Friday.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Amrit's nectar

His fans think he rocks, but Amrit Gurung of Nepathya is probably less rock musician and more fusion artist. He is that rare breed who can manage ethnic responsibilities with global sensibilities. His music could easily fit into the hip new strains of the Buddha Bar and Café del Mar school along with the world's best fusionists.

Purists accuse Amrit for Westernising Nepali music with drums, electric guitars and rock-style vocals. But those who feel music, know that no Nepali musician has ever been able to fuse folk elements into rock the way he does. His beat, rhythm and singing are all folk.

Amrit owes his musical success to folk songs, especially to gaines ('Gaines are us', # 181). As a young village boy in Kaski, his first encounter with the gaines set Amrit's young heart on music. Growing up, he began to question the social exclusion of the gaines.

Last year, Amrit went to central Nepal to find the best gaines in the country. They were brought to Kathmandu to participate in the Gandharba Festival last week. For the first time, young gaines had the opportunity to sing before their role models. "The transfer of skills and craft from the old to new generation was heartening to behold," says Amrit.

But Amrit and his friends were saddened by the lack of Kathmandu's well-known singers, musicians and literary figures



MIN BAJRACHARYA


among the audience. The gaines had travelled all the way from their home villages to share their music in the city, but Kathmandu's musicians did not have time to listen to them.

Amrit originally wanted to be a painter. Two friends, Bhim Pun and Deepak Rana, now part of Nepathya, coaxed him into singing. His first song, *Ey Maya Timilai Parkhi Baseko Chhu* was

an instant hit in 1991, throwing the spotlight on Nepathya. The last hit *Resham* confirmed his musical talent. Amrit's latest feat was to turn a little known mountain song *Bheda ko Oon Jasto* into a popular hit.

Folk music is special to Amrit because, he says: "Only by preserving indigenous music can we save nationalism."

(Naresh Newar)




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25 Years Ago

Most newspapers around the world have sections that carry interesting snippets of news from a decade or so ago in order that readers get an idea of how much progress the country has made, what great strides society has taken, and how every day in every way we get older and wiser.

In this way, communities and nations pass their collective experiences from one generation to another so that another cohort



of adolescents can make the same mistakes all over again. Being the carriers of this nation's institutional memory, we in the media therefore take very seriously our public service responsibility of being newspapers of record. This is why we have taken the trouble this week of going back in time to pick items of news from newspapers of yore that demonstrate our laughable early primitiveness and naïvete, and contrast that to the professionalism and press freedom that we

enjoy today to publish any ox excrement we like, and get away with it. These are freedoms that we should defend tooth and nail and never take for granted. Here is a selection of news items from *The Rise and Shine Nepal*, circa February 1979:

PM Thapa sworn in
Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa was sworn in today for the second time as prime minister at a function at the royal palace. Speaking to media newspaperpersons afterwards, PM Thapa said he was working towards setting the world record for the most frequent prime minister and pledged to complete at least five tenures by the dawn of the next millenium. "You will see. I'll still be prime minister in 2004," he predicted, amidst gales of laughter from the press corps.

Arniko born in Nepal
A birth certificate belonging to Arniko has been found in a bahal in Thimi, conclusively proving that the famous Nepali architect was in fact born in Nepal and not

in China, as claimed by a Hong Kong newspaper last week. That report set off protests in the streets of the capital during which effigies of the Hong Kong paper were set alight by protestors to ward off the chill. "We never knew he was from Thimi, but now that we do, we can't let the Honkies claim our national hero," said one protestor, shouting aggressive slogans.

Their Majesties grace *Feu de Joie*
Their Majesties graced a *feu de joie* (French for 'blaze away at the sky') on the occasion of Shivaratri, observing a grand tradition of the Royal Nepalese Army in which soldiers line up along the perimeter of Tundikhel and fire their muskets aimlessly with wild abandon. The military spokesperson said this year's *feu de joie* was "spectacularly successful and a sign of things to come". The army also performed a 'Beating Retreat' (English for 'marching backwards in a disciplined manner') parade which drew loud applause

and wolf-whistles from onlookers perched on trees in the vicinity of the Martyr's Memorial.

Sikkim is Sikkimised
India today occupied Sikkim, telling the Choegyal to "go take a walk", official reports from Gangtok said.

The move was greeted by howls of protest from the citizens of that landlocked Himalayan kingdom that has often been described by historians as an olive pip between two boulders. Many Sikkimese were distraught that they would have to stop issuing postage stamps depicting rare whales, but they were assuaged when told by New Delhi that their country's name would henceforth be immortalised by the Oxford Dictionary as an intransitive verb meaning: 'obliterated, wiped out, gobbled up, chomped off, made a part of something bigger, or all of the above'.



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घर त्यही हो, जहाँ सुखको बास हुन्छ

अत्यन्त न्यून वार्षिक ब्याजदर **८.५०%** मात्र

८०% सम्म बैंक फाइनेन्स उपलब्ध*
साथै हामीले ब्याज भुक्तानी प्रक्रियामा समेत व्यापक लघ्वन्ता अपनाएका छौ । हाम्रो "Home Loan Cell" मा आजै सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस् ।

८४४२४२९२, ४४२५१६३

०४०१ लाईपुर् बुटेल

Himalayan Bank Limited
घर खरिद
घर निर्माण
घर मर्मत
सबैको लागि Home Loan

Himalayan Bank Limited
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