Showdown
King Gyanendra defies Maoist threats to travel to Nepalganj on Sunday

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 Debi Raj Bhatt 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."

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

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At a time when the country is suffering from multiple crises, we have not seen the disruption of yet another street fight, one that pits rival media houses in a knockout tournament. The losers are Nepal 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. First, the content: the coverage of this media war was itself an indication of how easily media owners dumbed down journalistic ethics and independence to compete for column inches shamelessly for a partisan cause. The separation of news and opinion went out the window: inflammatory headlines, provocative politics, incendiary pictures and text led to no more than the role of the arsonists on the streets. Contrast this with the way the BBC covered the aftermath 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.

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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 Nepal?

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, Jharkot and Kailali, the three least-healthy districts. The average length of life in Kathmandu is 50 years more than in the three least-healthy districts.

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 discussions 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 1990, but that wasn’t enough.

The guiding principle, should be John Rawl’s Theory of Justice in which inequalities are limited to those who benefit the least advantage. Begin by cancelling the royal order for Rolls Royces and Jaguars.

Stephen Bezruchka worked in Nepal between 1978 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.
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 and Depts. Bribing officials or hiring hoodlums to control the market is standard operating procedure in nascent capitalism. Cumbersome 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 newstand two weeks ago, all we could do was hope that better sense would prevail. Also, instead of improving content to earn reader loyalty, the moral combat got nastier.

And when the anti-THT broadsheet cartel, Nepal Media Society, dragged out a delayed debate about the birthplace of Buddha into unnecessary controversy, it simply exposed the intellectual bankruptly 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-petited story on APCA House on 29 January, hurling 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, student protests are erupting, and the country is moving backwards in every field.

The Kathmandu Post initiative (‘Silicon Valley to Kathmandu Valley’, #180) is right on. NOT YELLOW and export IT services of significant scale to 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.

Peter Jackson’s, who brings Tolkien back to fun, but talent and originality like director Roshan’s non-remarks. 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, student protests are erupting, and the country is moving backwards in every field.

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I would like to applaud Suresh Ojha’s #180 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.

NOT YELLOW

Yubraj Ghimire’s research-type article ‘King’s ABC or Singhala’s paw?’ (#180) is right on. Ghimire bases 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 is no help, too. 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 monkey,’ (#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 Nepal 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 king 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 behalved 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 reader reviewers. This is to spare him the trouble of going through a torrent of endless letters raised against his criticism of the new film. Dixit is bored to tears. 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 Nepal 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 savaged from the competition and degenerate into a series of Rising Nepalis. 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.

Sewa Bhattarai, email

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Roshan's non-remarks.

Mina KC, email

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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 km 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’s risky, please be careful with your questions,” he warns as we reach the quiet, isolated village. Two hours drive west of Nepalgunj, many families here have willingly sent their children to join the Maoists. No coercion, no forced recruitment.

Because of this, Satariya has suffered less from the security forces and many Tharus have disappeared. No one suspected of being a Maoist ever returns after being taken for questioning around here. Bardiya has the highest number of disappeared 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 90-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 change. That isn’t the case right now. The Maoists also depress me. They have no compassion for life, no conscience, no forced recruitment.

It’s sad to leave a place after nearly four years. Sadder still, things are so gloomy, so hopeful. 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, there can be no return to authoritarian rule. The monarchy is on the way out, or in the air, as the royal family is up to the courts, not the publishers 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.

Last and least, our dire development negatives, of their missing sons and daughters, are excluded. The agitation against the security forces and many Tharus have disappeared. No one suspected of being a Maoist ever returns after being taken for questioning around here. Bardiya has the highest number of disappeared in Nepal.

Public felicitation ceremonies and ban on Tharu student meetings.

Those who agitate on the streets against the monarchy aren’t exactly harbingers of hope either. It’s 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 unending trickle of bloodshed in almost every village in Nepal. Because of this, Satariya has suffered less from the security forces and many Tharus have disappeared. No one suspected of being a Maoist ever returns after being taken for questioning around here. Bardiya has the highest number of disappeared in Nepal.

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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 sympathizers 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 jamindars 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 we cultivated.”

“We have never been treated with respect,” says Lahani 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 college 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 Tharus. “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 naive, 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. “Now we are in the frontline facing the bullets and dying like dogs.”

“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.

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“Sign the human rights accord”

Nepali Times: How bad is it?

Elizabeth Rowsell: This time we went to Nuwatok, 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 exterion, 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.

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 Rowsell, 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.
Allowing 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 a dialogue through street protests. In fact the society should be at the forefront of decrying violence instead of inciting it. By taking to the streets, the society has shown that it doesn't believe in the rule of law. What next: snatching of another colleague's office? And what will the protests escalate out of control?

The CIIA also has a role in triggering the backlash against THT and its publisher, the Asia-Pacific Communications Association (APCA). It is showing too much eagerness to pursue the case of Kathmandu's THT license and the detention of its managing director. It should also investigate the alleged irregularity in the APCA investment. All the CIIA did was to write to the government to come out with a clearer policy on foreign direct investment in the media. Is that really the CIIA's job?

Whether it is the CIIA or the media, exceeding the limits of authority is counterproductive. It is now brought to us as this sorry state of Journalism vs vandalism.
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 2020. 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 discernable changes. “The good news was that SAFTA came about earlier than expected,” says Rajendra Dabadi, Executive Director at the FNCCI. “Without such a strategy, we are not in a position to say if we will benefit or lose from SAFTA. Such efforts 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. “They are the cost of our exports and minimise our comparative advantage,”

India is Nepal’s biggest trading partner and it has exemptions on 30 million goods worth 30 billion goods annually. This could have reached saturation since India produced just about everything. “If the SAFTA provisions are put in place, Nepalis would not be able to compete with Indian manufacturers. What is true for India could apply to every country in SAARC,” says economist Bishwanath Pyakurel. “If the tariffs are brought down to zero in all SAARC nations, it will be advantageous to us.”

There has been no research in this regard,” says Hanta Dubahi, Executive Director at the FNCCI. “Without such a strategy, we are not in a position to say if we will benefit or lose from SAFTA. Such efforts require massive investments which we can’t afford.”

But if Nepal isn’t prepared to succeed. But if Nepal isn’t prepared to

India must have a strategy if it is to succeed. But if Nepal isn’t prepared to

Media is the message

Strictly Business

Ashutosh Tiwari

The Saturday after this week’s column covered the beginning of the newspaper war. The Himalayan Times (HT) responded to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post ‘s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to The Kathmandu Post’s price-cuts, and reduced its prices by Rs 1. This marked a further victory to

Readers also have a wider choice and advertisers have a pick. Newspapers have competed with one another and with other forms of media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to nationalism. Nice trick, but print media is no more sensitive to

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FEBRUARY 2004
The king and the people need each other

The king and the people need each other. Intelligence may not be enough to change the course of history and the foundation modeled on the ‘Prince’s Trust’ which raises money for young people in Nepal should have a royal family raise hundreds of millions of pounds for charitable causes to be of a monarch who is above rhetoric, who is not just playing politics.

Once such an initiative is launched, there will be no shortage of philanthropists and charities inside and outside Nepal who will pour in money.

King Gyanendra reiterates his desire to play a “constructive role”. It must have come to their notice that in Britain the members of the royal family visit every year. 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 will judge if their assessment is correct.

But the real question is whether politics is the right setting 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.
Identity crisis

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

MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

At a time when the city cores of the Valley’s towns 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 guthiyas donated money for the reconstruction, and locals contributed voluntary labour.

The chairman of the Chyasal Tile Sudhhar 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)
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 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 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 Chyauel.

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 towns 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.”

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

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

Most Nepal 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, the Tarai, the Indian Sunderbans, Carribbean islands, Amazon River basin and inland swamplands of southern and western Africa. Although rice is found mostly in tropical areas, the experience 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, Karnalpolkari in Palpa, Bulbule lake area in Surkhet, Kathmandu, Nepalgunj and the Lothar settlements and sedimentation. Although local communities use wild rice during religious and cultural occasions, they are not fully aware of the value of these wildland 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.

A 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 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’s not fit for human consumption, it is not cultivated because harvesting it is tedious. Wild rice is usually harvested for cattle feed.

Every year from November-December, the people around Ajingara Lake in Kapilbastu tie cloth and plastic bags on wild rice plants to collect their seeds called aina/tinna which are eaten during the Chhar festival and fasts like ekadashi. In the Lumbini area, wild rice (Oryza 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. Kazhi 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.

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 rice to produce enough beta-carotene to make 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 world.

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

Feisty 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: Gadgule Marsi, Thathi, Mansara, Anadi, Rajbhog, Krishna Bhog, Samundra Pheme, Phulme.

At Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC) Bhula Man Singh Baniot, says this year Nepal has recorded the highest yield ever: 2.3 tons per hectare. But 99 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 Tikli from Dang and the aromatic Jetho Budo from Pokhara.

Local varieties are important because they are disease, drought and insect-resistant,” explains Baniot. 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 Khamal-4, a fine non-glutinous rice and Manjushree-2, another popular fine rice. Thachiung-176 is a glutinous rice very popular in Kathmandu, particularly among the Newars to make chiura and Jeera. Nepali 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 Khural’s business to know where the rice grows 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.

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

(Sameer Karki)

The solution to current malnutrition problems is compelling.

The argument that golden rice and other fortified strains may be the answer to the over one million child deaths each year and the 300,000 cases of blindness caused by severe vitamin A deficiency is compelling. 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.

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

Poldhatri and Jeera Maseno are more popular among the middle- and higher-middle class, while Basmati varies according to quality. Khural’s personal favourite is Jeera Maseno “It’s good for my entire household, my employees and my children alike. We eat the same quality of rice and Jeera Maseno is average.”

Her own experience has been that rice grown in the belt spanning Sundarjal to Parauri 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.

(Jemima Sherpa)
F

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 Nepal, a new biography. "Lain wrote like a painter, approaching him about writing a biography," says Don Messerschmidt, an anthropologist and 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 Nepal, a new biography. "Lain wrote like a painter, approaching him about writing a biography," says Don Messerschmidt, an anthropologist who has spent nearly 30 years in Nepal, was intrigued by Bangdel and 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 tea when he could paint colourful motifs on the walls of the festival’s Garrison. 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 Dharmatirtha Koita, Parmaram Pradhan, a Nepali language teacher and Suryavikram Gewali, collectively known as ‘SuDhaPa’. Gewali introduced Bangdel to the 19th century poet Bhambhukuta 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 die 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 a 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 Sanyajit 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 Shumsher JB Rana, impressed by Bangdel’s portrait of Balkrishna Sama, gave him Rs 5,000. On 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 art, particularly stone sculptures, producing books like Early Sculptures of Nepal (1982), 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

India’s ruling party faces a
tierce time at the upcoming polls

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W ith 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 Bharatpur 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 Dalit (untouchables) and Muslim minorities. The BJP is also in a controversial position because of housing starts 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. 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 wasusted 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 polarized Indian society around 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 supremacy and a Hindu state, which will privilege this 80 percent majority. The party is closely tied to the Hindu-nationalist, right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (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 India. Historians have a very different, multicultural, multi-religious, view of the issue.

Less than two years ago, the Hindu-nationalists burned down 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. 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 one third of the new entrants into the job market. But the incomes of the top ten percent of India’s population have substantially increased—creating what the government 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 do the same. Before sending "taikonaut" Yang Liwei in space last year, 30 Chinese officials have hailed the country’s first manned space flight on 15 October last year as a “giant step" 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 quoted Sun Luyan, 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.

China is determined to launch its own interplanetary quest

China, a nascent space power, has been shying away from accepting US President George Bush’s White House offer 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.

An extended break over Chinese New Year, the lunar new year of 14 astronauts, will resume in March, according to the Beijing Youth Daily. It quoted Huang Weifan, director of research at China Astronautics 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 officials have hailed the country’s first manned space flight on 15 October last year as a “giant step" and declared that China’s space program was going according to timetable.

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Under an ambitious scheme also announced in December, Beijing wants the US space agency, the National Aeronautical 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," said the US president. “It is not a contest. Rather, it is a 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 manifest. Nor has the opposition been able to form a single common front.

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Castro’s Cuba

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

"The voice of Castro could be heard throughout the island," a prominent writer. "The 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 politicians in an April sweep—that is the most he has ever done 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 are better known for their self-confidence in Transparency International corruption index. But this could change as dollars become hard to resist and Cubans turn to cut through a cultural humanistic avant-garde. Already, the dollars have 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 dense 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. Ever since World Bank president James Wolfensohn acknowledged in 2001 that Cuba had done a “great job” on education and health care, he has been damming up the Cuban government’s progress in increasing the Bank’s 2004 report: “Making Services Work for Poor People,” which states that “such 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 had deteriorated in the years following the loss of Soviet aid. “Cubans are still endowed by this,” said one Western diplomat.

"The renegade anti-Castro Cuban exiles clustered in Miami argue that it is not true. A visitor in Cuba finds that’s not true. A visitor in Cuba finds that since the 1990s, there has been a drift away from Cuba. Those who try to travel, publish what they want, dance when and where they want and experience the world as it is experienced in Latin America. "It’s my life’s work," says one 28-year-old Cuban, referring to the political battle of communism versus capitalism that keeps him trapped on the island. "I am a new generation. I want to see that they had the chance to see."

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

UNVERIFIED

COMMENT
Lydia Chavez

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"The free education and health care are given to certain babies in 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."

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Jump potential
Where diseases are concerned, the unexpected will happen

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 coronavirus 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 infecting people, and consequently became highly virulent. Both aspects of this scenario—a virus jumping to a strange host and then mutating to a devastating form—are familiar. Watertight commonly spread influenza viruses to chickens, although the outcome usually is not 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.

Nanotechnology
It's no small matter

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.
 плохое лекарство

Раджані, 31 января

Несоответствующие препараты продаются по всей стране. Даже в больших городах люди могут увидеть их по цене в 40 рупий за килограмм. За это время произошло много жертв. Жители дома, которые хотели умереть, были вынуждены пить без воды.

В демократии, как правило, важно видеть положительные и отрицательные стороны политических лидеров. Люди могут принять эти лидеры. Некоторые люди могли бы сказать, что я сделал ошибку. Но я не могу упустить наши политические партии.

В конечном итоге, моя миссия была направлена на спасение жизни для народа. Я не могу позволить миру превратиться в хаос.

Протесты и Местные Организации Главы Правительства: Национальное обновление

"Это ужасно, что студенческие лидеры пытаются устанавливать условия для политической партии," - Гитанял Шереста, индивидуальный политик, в Janakpur, 2 февраля

"Итак, в этом направлении у нас есть новая стратегия." - Непал Чимпапура, 3 февраля

"Нам нужно уважать права людей. Мы не можем позволить мир превратиться в хаос."

По сообщениям из Непала, 6-12 февраля 2004 г. №182
capital. “I came from Taruk district,” says 14-year-old Rahul who can’t remember the names of his parents. Manoj, another child, says the two 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, UNICEF helps to hand the children over through ABC Nepal, a Kathmandu-based NGO.

1,500 orphans

Rediff.com, 31 January

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 a huge amount. Manoj, another child, who has left home and migrated to India. “I came from Taruk,” he says he too came from Nepal but he doesn’t know the name of his parents. Manoj, another child, who can’t remember the names of his parents. Manoj, another child, says the two 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, UNICEF helps to hand the children over through ABC Nepal, a Kathmandu-based NGO.

EU pressure

Kantipur, 4 February

Pressure from the European Union (EU) to improve the human rights situation in the country makes it clear that the national 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 decisions and improvement in law and order. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

Unhealthy journalism

Times, 1 February

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 Nepal 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 Amanpurna Post. It is undeniable that these are the largest selling dailies. In terms of circulation, THT is regarded as the top selling English daily newspaper due to its 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 ever 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 Amanpurna 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.

A Romantic Menu designed for someone special... Romanticize an electrifying moment... add some spice to romance... enjoy a quiet twosome meal.

14th February, 2004

Samanthabazar, 1 February

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FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

6 - 12 FEBRUARY 2004 #182

The Himalayan Times

Kantipur Publications

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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 Amanpurna Post. The Nepal Media Society (NMS), made up of Nepal 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 Amanpurna Post. It is undeniable that these are the largest selling dailies. In terms of circulation, THT is regarded as the top selling English daily newspaper due to its 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 ever 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 Amanpurna 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.

A Romantic Menu designed for someone special... Romanticize an electrifying moment... add some spice to romance... enjoy a quiet twosome meal.

14th February, 2004
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.

A
fter 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 false Hitlers. Later, we found out he had already committed suicide.

Subah Chandu 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 on both the British and the Japanese armies against each other! The Japanese continued fighting in Asia even after the German surrender.

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 in training. It was now time for the British to leave India. My grandfather was mess sergeant, father a sergeant and grandson serving in the same unit. The grandfather, father and grandson serving in the same unit. The grandfather, father and grandson serving in the same unit.

My wife is still here with me. She was 15 years old. She had never been to school. What could be the present from Gurkhas other than the rupee to the priest who gave us cow urine. The Rana regime 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.

Gurkhas were fighting in both the British and the Japanese armies against each other! 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 on 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 money we resisted to being tossed into 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.

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It was in training. It was now time for the British to leave India. I wasn’t yet married. My wife is still here with me. She was 15 years old. She had never been to school. What could be the present from Gurkhas other than the rupee to the priest who gave us cow urine. The Rana regime.

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.

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.

The kitchen 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 rupee to the priest who gave us cow urine. The Rana regime.

World War and two in the jungles of Malaya in 1948. 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 Bhirsi in Gorkha, all five brothers were killed: three brothers in the Second World War and two in the jungles of Malaya in 1948.

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**Golf for beginners**

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 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 unenjoyable. 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 and the nearest being the red tee for men 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. This area is kept in good condition to make play easier by rewarding a straight direction you should be hitting the ball. Fairway grass is cut quite short and maintained to make play easier by rewarding a straight 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 direction you should be hitting the ball.

- **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** – Hazards include water bodies, ditches, drains and bunkers which are again placed 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 and difficult.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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 pill filled with sand. It is much more difficult to play a shot from a bunker, so these are difficult 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.

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- **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.

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**Reign in Spain**

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 moments. The film opens with Cruyff in shirt, trousers and loafers kicking around a ball on a patch of grass high in the mountains. He rides the ball 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 it’s 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.

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The Heart Must Break: The Fight for Democracy and Truth in Burma
James Mawdsley
Arrow Books, 2002
Rs 600

Within just 10 hours of entering Burma and handing out pro-democracy letters, James Mawdsley was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment. Undaunted, he used this time in prison to challenge and defy the regime’s lawsless 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, Kantipur, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

As this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows, the Indo-Gangetic fog is now shrinking bringing some sunshine to the town and inner-city valleys. The hills and mountains have glorious sunshine, and this pattern will continue during the weekend and coming week since there are no major westernly fronts on the horizon. Temperature is set to drop by a notch from the south. However, this will also bring in the haze that will obscure the sun.

Prepare for frosty mornings for Kathmandu with hazy sunshine and breezy afternoons.
DIEFEKT 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.

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

TRAVELLING LIGHT: Ricky Day Angrela and Alain Honeyborene 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.

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

Amrit’s nectar

H is 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 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 Timli Pankhi Baseko Chhu was an instant hit in 1991, throwing the spotlight on Nepathya. The last hit Restham confirmed his musical talent. Amrit’s latest feat was to turn a little known mountain song Sheda 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 Neumar)
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 millennium. “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 regarding 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.

Happy Valentines from WAVE

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