8, going on 9

As the Maoist war completes eight years, never has peace seemed as remote. Nepalis caught in the middle have fled their villages by the hundreds of thousands. The country’s military budget has increased at least three times more than peacetime levels. Most of the money has been diverted from development projects. Weapons are getting more sophisticated: the latest purchases are two Indian-made light attack helicopters that cost Rs 3 billion each.

The Maoists have suffered military setbacks and desertions, but have benefited from reports of human rights abuses by the forces as well as infighting between the palace and the parties, and between hawks and doves among Nepal’s donors.

However, the biggest blow to the Maoists has been the dramatic extradition by India of senior Maoist leaders Matrika Yadav and Suresh Ale this week. An Indian embassy official confirmed the handover and said it was kept low key because of the “legal implications back in India” as the Indo-Nepal bilateral extradition treaty is not yet in place.

Maoist leader Prachanda lashed back, saying in an online statement: “By kidnapping a popular tarai leader and a member of a downtrodden janjati group, India’s rulers have distanced themselves even further from the hearts of the Nepalis.” These are the harshest words the Maoists have used against India in the recent past.

The government hasn’t been able to hide its delight. However, spokesman Kamal Thapa denied there would be any peace overtures to the Maoists as a result. “We will carry on with our military operations, and strongly mobilise the security forces against them,” he told us.

Although losing safe havens in India will be a disadvantage to the Maoists, analysts say one test of whether or not attitudes have changed will be India’s response to a big rally planned in New Delhi on Sunday by the ‘Nepalese People’s Right Protection Committee, India’ that has close ties with Nepali Maoists.

“Officially, this sends the message that India is no longer safe. The Maoists have two options: give up violence and join the political mainstream, or antagonise India further,” says Shyam Shrestha, editor of the leftist monthly magazine Mulyankan.

With the government maintaining a hawkish line, the Maoists commemorating their anniversary with a series of strikes and sabotage attacks and the palace-party polarisation getting worse, it looks like the country is heading into another spring of turmoil and instability.

KUNDA DIXIT

Twelve-year-old Surendra Shrestha bikes in Tahachal during Thursday’s bandh. He was four when the war started.
Nepalis have endured the Maoist violence of the past eight years, suffering greatly. Some believe the Maoists when they say violence is a necessary sacrifice they have to make for a better tomorrow, others are too scared to disagree. The political parties have shifted from anti-oligarchic to pro-republican, but the people see it as just another slogan. Increasingly, the parties with which legitimacy is gained seems more important than actual fulfillment of the mandate. For the matter. But for the parties, the procedure with which that legitimacy is achieved is what matters to them, not what they want. I am bemused public just look on from overhead bridges.

The people have reacted to these promises with stoic skepticism. They don't trust any of the politicians and ruthless rebels by redefining the role of a monarch within a democracy—and so what if a few thousand people die in the process of being liberated? King Gyanendra sees his role as a knight in shining armor who is now just a statistic in the list of disappeared. This is a phenomenon that needs urgent attention.

In Sunari village of Bardia district, only one in every four of the 80 women who got married to locally posted security force personnel were taken by their husbands when reconstituted. “These honest security men were the armed police, not the military,” explains one woman from the nearby village of Kalika. Said another woman: “Even if it was a pretend marriage, it was still rape, and we hope that once they hear they have children they will come back.” But many of the mothers don’t even know where to begin looking for their children.

If even if the men deserted the women, one could argue that the relationship was consensual. But there are now many cases of rape by security forces. “They were the lucky ones,” one woman, Thakurdwara whispers to me, referring to the abandoned wives. “I was raped.” The security forces’ men entered her bedroom while they were looking for Maoists, for the maid, for the boy. “When they saw only women inside, they raped them.” “A 10-year-old takes me aside and tells me her story. Some soldiers entered her house and dragged away her husband, but four others stayed behind. They eyed her and her baby as she was nursing. I just turned towards the wall and sat still,” she recalls in a low voice. They tore off her blouse and short, grabbed her breast and bit it until it bled. All four took turns to rape her.

She never saw her husband, who is now just a statistic in the list of Nepal’s disappeared. “If I ever see those soldiers again, I will kill them myself,” she tells me, her lips quivering with anger. “I completely broke down, and I weep with her. There were others in Bardia with similar stories, many of them unmarried school girls. Up in the hills in Rolpa’s Bhawang the past eight years of war has meant endless trauma: losing dear ones, being forced to flee homes and rape. In Bhawang alone, there are now 36 women with children born rape by police who were posted here during the early part of the conflict in 1996. Senior army officers I have spoken to in Dang admit there have been some instances of rape and, whenever uncovered, the guilty soldiers have been punished. But aside from the question of bringing the perpetrators to justice, there is now the problem of finding support for Nepal’s war babies. Without fathers, the children can’t even register to attend school and are unable to apply for citizenship. Even unmarried mothers can’t apply for citizenship papers without a husband.

Weer, Nepali law denies a woman the right to divorce. The state must now remedy the laws so these forgotten victims of the war are rehabilitated and cared for even if it can’t find and punish the guilty. Just talking about this in Kathmandu is not going to help; we need to document these cases, change the laws, provide the mother’s body and take care of the women. Finally, the forces responsible for the abuse of Nepali women must be held accountable.

The government needs to enact the National Commission for Women Act that will establish a commission as a powerful apex body so it can drive things like systematic legal reform and oversee intransigence.

Dr Durga Pokhrel is the chairperson of the National Commission for Women.
STATE OF THE STATE

OK Lak

King Gyanendra first made an oblique reference to a ‘constructive’ monarchy as an alternative to a constitutional one at his felicitation program in Biratnagar last January. He reiterated this concept, again a bit vaguely, at another felicitation ceremony in Dhangadi in April. Meanwhile, the royal propaganda machine was relentlessly churning out the king’s disquiet with mainstream political parties. Now, the gloves are off. Not content with the tone and tenor of the loyal royals, King Gyanendra seems to have decided to enter the fray himself. Sunday’s felicitation ceremony at the Mahendra Stadium in Nepalgunj was held amidst tight security with helicopter gunships patrolling the sky. ‘The days of monarchy being seen but not heard, watching the people’s difficulties but not addressing them and being a silent spectator to their tear-stained faces are over,’ said the king. ‘Premier Surya Bahadur Thapa, it seems, needn’t harbour any illusions about his executive powers. The reception at Nepalgunj was too lack-lustre to ignite any spontaneous gestures of support. The king coughed through his address and the event itself was so banal that Nepal Television’s Durga Nath Shrestha had no one to follow and the royal propagandist Ubraj Gauram of Gorkhapatra Sansthan to elaborate on the successes of the ceremony.

With all his considered wisdom, the king seems to have concluded that opposition to his active rule can be brooked, booted or hashed into submission with little or no risk to the institution of monarchy. Time will test the validity of his assumptions, but for now, political parties have few options left. Leaders of mainstream parties are bracing themselves for a prolonged struggle. What will the king’s next move be? There may be clues from the way Gen Musharraf has consolidated power in the past four years. After all, like in Pakistan there is a self-selected elite here that considers itself the custodian of the national interest. The ruling class in both countries think that it is their mandate to lift the ignorant masses from their collective misery. The symbol of the ruling edgarchy in Pakistan is its defence forces—commander, omnipotent and sacrosanct. After the Shah Restoration of the 1950s, the monarchy in Nepal has always been at the head of the ruling coalition that consists of the military, the mandarins and the merchants. Add to that the mandarins and leaders and we have the five pillars of the establishment. In addition to the ‘Made in USA’ label, there are other similarities between the guided democracies in Pakistan and Nepal: both taken over were-staged in October, Gen Musharraf also had a ‘Seven Point’ agenda, our CIAA has been as active as Pakistan’s National Accountability Bureau, Musharraf too opened the floodgates of ordinances, capping them with his Legal Framework Order. King Gyanendra must be contemplating a similar move to institutionalise his constructive role. The king will probably learn a few more lessons from Pakistan, join as his late father King Mahendra did, and replicate Gen Ayub Khan’s Basic Democracy in Nepal in the 60s. Will it consist of holding

Following the Musharraf roadmap in Nepal

Musharraf-type elections by disqualifying all major political figures by claiming that they are tainted with the charges of corruption? King Gyanendra sees himself as a ‘doer’ king in the mould of his ancestor King Prithibi Narayan Shah the Great. In that case, we may be three years into a model that may be three centuries old. Dismissing Karl Marx’s conclusion of Hegel, Julian Barnes writes in A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters: ‘Does history repeat itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. No, that’s too grand, too considered a process. History just burps, and we taste again that raw-onion sandwich it swallowed centuries ago.’
Resisting a Barbie world

Only milk should be homogenised. Nothing else

COMPASSION, FREE SERVICE AND DEDICATION TO THE COMMUNITY ARE HALLMARKS OF AN ANCIENT HIMALAYAN MEDICAL TRADITION

Amchi

NARESH NEWAR

It's love at first sight: breathtaking Shy Phoksundo Lake, wind-swept rocky crags, high passes where the Snow Leopards and Blue Sheep roam. The wonders of Dolpo never cease.

Walking across this remote district at altitudes above 5,000m, the climate and terrain are harsh and unforgiving. Travellers have died of altitude sickness and starvation. Few city folks are prepared for the hardships, even if the reward is the most spectacular scenery on earth.

Here at Komang, a 10-day walk west of Jomsom, the local Dolpali are used to living without modern basic necessities. There is no electricity, no running water, no telephone services. People travel to the Tibetan border for supplies and bring them back in yak caravans. Their only tenuous link with the outside world is Radio Nepal, but it broadcasts in Nepali which the Dolpali cannot understand. The nearest health post with a doctor is several days walk away.

The modern health care system is virtually non-existent and the one thing that has kept the people here healthy is the indigenous medical knowledge of the Amchi, Buddhist lamas who practice an ancient herbal medical regime.

Sowa Rigpa, the Amchi art of healing rooted in Tibetan medicine, has existed since the Bonpo civilization. The most experienced Amchi of Dolpo, Kunma Lhundup, who lives in Komang, traces his lineage to King Trong Dens of 8th century Tibet. The Amchis of today owe the survival of their practice to a king who invited nine of the most knowledgeable Amchis from Nepal, India, China and Mongolia to incorporate their medical knowledge in Gyantsete, which remains an valuable source for Amchi even today.

Mustang and Dolpo used to be a part of the Bonpo kingdom of Zhang Zhung, and has the most Amchis. Dolpo alone has about 64, one in each village so people don’t have to travel to distant health clinics. Amchis help to heal common ailments as well as fractures and other physical wounds in combination of physical and spiritual skills. Most of the sick who opt for a town hospital never make it there. Many consider the unaided visit a sacrificial.

Despite the invaluable and free medical service, the government in faraway Kathmandu has never accorded the Amchi any recognition.

In China, Amchis have been given national acceptance and their profession is institutionalised. Practitioners receive allopathic and Western medical training as well. Many are dentists and cataract surgeons.

"The government needs to recognise Amchi training schools as medical institutions, so that Amchis get certificated as real doctors in remote mountain districts," says Amchi Gyanso, chairman of the Himalayan Amchi Association (HAA). Unlike

The majority used to win, now it is the minority, the less than one percent in a million who walk the ramps, fill the celluloid and TV screens, who spout instant answers vowing to save the earth and serve mankind by creating artificial parameters of beauty. The images that come to mind when you speak of great looks are the same names that rule the world, the iconic, the less than one percent in a million who walk the ramps, fill the celluloid. It is a one-way traffic from the 'developed' West to the 'developing' South, and then Eastwards to our own 'under-developed' side of the map. Values loaded with aggressiveness, materialism, winning at any cost, facial features of certain textures and forms, bosoms, waists and hips of pre-ordained proportions. This onslaught of imported preferences have taken over local choice.

Strategic international yardsticks now promote the products that are sold through cable, internet and glossies. Are we educating our young to see through all this, to scratch hard at the veneer for the truth? Are we protecting them for a life in a world which will turn them into clones that buy cloned products? Will they be forced to sacrifice their identity, uproot themselves and forget who they are? They each have unique characteristics, special qualities that deserve to be nurtured and given space to grow. Diversity that should be respected, celebrated and treasured. Homogeneity is not natural, it is a slow synthetic poison. We need to teach ourselves the value of self-worth, the meaning of beauty and the meaning of life. We need to look within our own communities, our way of life, our values, to learn from each other.

Amchi Association (HAA) have also been working to have their profession institutionalised. The government needs to accredit the Amchi profession and the Amchi Association (HAA) to create lifetime achievement awards for those who have contributed to their profession.

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The government is outsourcing park management

The controversy over the government’s decision to hand over protected areas to the private sector has finally been clarified: the parks will be managed by NGOs and local communities.

After the announcement was made during the budget speech in July 2003, the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC) came under sharp criticism from conservationists for cutting decades of biodiversity efforts at risk. The government has now ruled out handing the parks to commercial interests, and is giving them to non-profit conservation groups.

It says only NGOs with proven record in biodiversity conservation will get the chance to manage the parks without government supervision. Protected areas consist of national parks, wildlife reserves, buffer zones and conservation areas.

The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) has already received approval from the government to manage Rara National Park. Shey Phoksumdo National Park and Sherpani Waterfalls & Wildlife Reserve—all of which are located in ecologically sensitive regions. Rara Nepal’s smallest national park and Shey Phoksumdo is the largest, and both are habitats of rare wildlife species like the musk deer, blue sheep, snow trout and snow leopard. Rara has the country’s largest lake, and Shey Phoksumdo the highest.

While KMTNC has experience in running successful conservation programs in the country, the fact that it was handed Rara and Shey Phoksumdo has raised eyebrows here. KMTNC worked with WWF Nepal and Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation to turn the Annapurna Conservation Area into a world-class eco-tourism model.

“Both success may not be achieved without government monitoring and supervision,” says Krishna Humagain from Nepal Foresters Association. The government is in a bind: as the army is redeployed from guarding national parks to security duties, who will take the parks after the government? Conservationists say local communities should be more directly involved in conservation, and cite the example of Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) to Local Users Council as an example.

The council will work with WWF Nepal and the Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) to manage the park in training local expertise for conservation so the park can be handed over. “If this community effort goes well, Kanchenjunga will be a model for proactive and decentralised management of protected areas not found anywhere else in the world,” says Chandra Gurung, WWF’s country representative.

Nepal’s protected areas were established during the early 70s to cover 21,000 sq km, about 14 percent of the country’s total land area. There are eight national parks, four wildlife reserves, two conservation areas and one hunting reserve in the country.

(Shahique Bhandari)

NGO conservation

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(Shahique Bhandari)
Sharing water

SALMAN HAIDAR in THE STATESMAN

Statesman

ince the early years of Indian independence, there have been visionary schemes for taking water from regions of excess to those of shortage. Now there is the even more far-reaching concept of linking the country’s major rivers and tributaries. This is a huge imaginative leap, which seems both expected as well as doubt, even alarm: upper riparians want a say in what is being planned, lower riparians fear they will lose out. Neighbouring watch carefully, none more so than Nepal, source of 70 percent of the Ganga flood season flows and hence a necessary partner in any such a scheme. Nepal has been very interested in the idea of hydro-electric power and its preference has been to design the project to provide peak power because electricity supplied at the time of maximum demand yields the highest revenue.

A

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

Anagha Neelakantan

A trip South often requires considerable amounts of time and energy, and, additionally, proportionately smaller amounts of money, on the rail. There are train routes in India that are swift, well-lit, clean and extremely commuter-friendly. This is important, and not merely stochastic. Paul Theroux may be dedicated to train travel and romanticise the great railway journeys of the world, or explore the anthropological possibilities of train travel in China. Yet, for some of us, trains as a mode of getting from Point A to Point B are disturbing. And journeys are, apparently, different if you’re not getting a book contract or two out of them. Yes, the pace of train travel is wonderful in its own right, with the quickie effect of airplanes, but, you don’t have to strain every sinew in your flabby legs except for the moment you board a certain Indian trains. I wonder how many people actually emerge energetic and with a sparkling new insight into the organisation of Indian society or the suspicion of traditionally ascribed identities in the liminal context of Train Journeys. True, trains are an equaliser in that, once out of the opposition and immensely more dangerous ‘Ladies’ compartments’, if you have to have a snack in the presence of an Unmentionable, or share taps and toilets with people you would simply rather pretend didn’t exist, for the most part, people hold their breath and get on with it.

The main source of discomfort on long distance train travel, as I see it, is that it often involves coming face to face with people who do not, in fact, wish to have home, or carry home with them as a precaution to movement. The hard sleepers that are the product of the systematic falling of vast tracts of rain forests are troublesome in many ways. Even the food is strangely compelling, with the trays of greasy and overpriced goods. Indian Curry. Disturbing are the many people who, having barely sat down on their third or half of the seat, begin recombining close reproductions of Home. (Salman Haidar is a former Foreign Secretary of India)
**Knee-jerk hair-splitting**

If the king trusts the people, why don’t the parties?

Given the existing level of trust (or lack thereof) between King Gyanendra and the parliamentary parties, it was natural that the royal address in Nepalgunj would be misinterpreted.

This time the monarch showed more pragmatic maturity and tried to appear more conciliatory than during the two felicitations last year. Notwithstanding the cynicism and hostile reactions showered on him and the accusation of harbouring a hidden agenda, King Gyanendra threw the trump card of election on the table.

How soon the political parties will want the election to happen now depends entirely on who they want to derive the power from: the king, or the people.

The Maoists' guerrilla strength has been substantially reduced by the security forces, although the situation still can’t be called conducive for free and fair elections. But the detention and handover of two prominent Maoist leaders Matrika Yadav and Suresh Ale Magar by the Indian authorities this week is a clear indication India will act, and will be seen to be acting tough, on the Indo-Nepal SAARC summit.

The Maoist leadership now faces a difficult situation in India. It may either have to return to Nepal to pursue democratic and peaceful politics, or defy the Government of India openly by joining hands with the ‘Communist Revolutionary Zone’ in South Asia. A pro-Maoist group is holding a meeting in New Delhi on 15 February to mark the eighth anniversary of the ‘People’s War’. King Gyanendra was no doubt critical of the role of political parties during the past 13 years, and far less introspective about the role of monarchy in previous years. However, he did take a cue from BP Koirala (without mentioning his name) when he pleaded that the fruit of reconciliation could be “sweet”. The political parties have been challenged: to go to the polls, or force the king to rule indefinitely (if not forever) in the garb of a constitutional monarch. The choice lies with the political parties more than the king.

It will be unfair to conclude that the king is banking on the Maoists to disrupt elections so he can continue ruling. The argument that the king wants to be an ‘active monarch’ is unfounded. The present constitution did not envisage the king’s active role. And the moment elections take place and executive powers are exercised by an elected government enjoying a parliamentary majority, the king will be back to where he was pre-4 October 2002. Only the political parties, especially the five agitating ones, have the power to grant the status of an ‘active monarch’ to King Gyanendra by running away from polls indefinitely.

The Maoists have an equally crucial decision to make. Their previous tactic of divide-and-destroy may not be as effective anymore and they can make multiparty parliamentary democracy more vibrant, pro-people and an effective tool of democracy if they shun violence. Alternatively, a democratically elected government will be better equipped to deal or negotiate with the Maoists in a more acceptable manner.

It may seem that the Nepalganj address extended the life of the Surya Bahadur Thapa government. But it now faces the added responsibility of stepping up the initiative to seek wider political participation and announce the date for elections at the earliest. It can’t just reduce the king’s call for elections as a time-buying exercise. An early election will not only end the uncertainty of the present constitution, but will also bring on track the roles of the executive, legislature, as well as monarchy. Any modification in the current role of these institutions will fall into the domain of a future parliament. Continued cynicism and hostility or excessive hair-splitting of the Nepalganj address will only prove that political parties are as feckless as the king hinted at.

Their wisdom will lie in accepting the real challenge: if the king trusts the people, why don’t you?"
Reinterpreting ethnicity

UK Nepalis celebrated Lhosar regardless of their backgrounds, what they had in common was their Nepali identity.

Last month my family celebrated Lhosar near London at a show arranged by the Tamu Dinu (Gurung Home) Association. Gurungs, mainly from army backgrounds, founded this association with the primary purpose of teaching their children the culture of their forefathers. Yet nowadays the New Year event attracts over 1,300 Nepalis from across the community to share the celebration. It is important that in the UK, the Tamu community comes together, because it fosters a real sense of kinship and goodwill from which no one is left isolated.

The myriad of over 60 caste and ethnic groups that live side-by-side in the Tamu community are one of the most obvious signs of the diversity in Nepal. Consolidated in the Constitution of 1990 as a “multi-ethnic, multi-lingual... Hindu and constitutional monarchical kingdom”, Nepali society continues to swing between caste and ethnic loyalty, and the broader national Nepali identity. These bold statements masked a reality in which the majority of ethnic groups remained on the periphery of national development, falling behind in terms of employment and education, whilst a tiny urban elite reaped the benefits of a new economic freedom. Since the introduction of the new constitution and multiparty democracy in 1990, many of these ethnic groups organised themselves to promote their rights, languages and cultures.

Ethnicity has become increasingly prominent in the current political troubles, often being used as a rallying call for dissent and dissatisfaction. Groups like the Khumbu in the west, and the Tharu Muki Morcha in the east have thrown in their lot with the Maoist insurgents. The state, for its part, has shown its mistrust of ethnic organisations (even those with no links to the conflict), as demonstrated in the arrests and “disappearance” of members of the Newar Khala and Tamang Gherung in the Kathmandu Valley over the last few months. In the modern context, multi-ethnic Nepal seems to be less a cause for celebration, but in political perceptions at least, a threat to national stability.

The Nepali community in the UK has come a long way from its very limited origins—the first migrants arrived in London in the 1960s and British Army Gurkhas began to be stationed in Britain in the early 1970s. Today there are more than 20,000 Nepalis living here, including students, workers, restaurant owners, professionals and soldiers, from many regions of Nepal. There are now more than 200 different ethnic groups living here that makes people like you and me. Yet, life in the UK does not lend itself to the social ties and structures that are left behind in Nepal. Family, village, caste and ethnic group provide support and a sense of identity to individuals in Nepal, to the extent that Nepali nationalism often takes second place to family and clan loyalty.

The lack of all these things in London has required a social shift within the Nepali community. A system of support and identity that break down the barriers of ethnicity and caste. Perhaps it is the hard economic environment in the UK and the relatively small population of migrant groups living here that makes people like you and me. Yet, life in the UK does not lend itself to the social ties and structures that are left behind in Nepal. Family, village, caste and ethnic group provide support and a sense of identity to individuals in Nepal, to the extent that Nepali nationalism often takes second place to family and clan loyalty.

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Flying solo

Competing interests delay
Royal Nepal Airlines’ plan to add a 757

lagged by frequent groundings of its two 15-year-old 757s. Royal Nepal Airlines announced last year it was adding another jet to stabilise schedules. But plans to lease the third jet has been delayed by serious differences between board members about the kind of aircraft.

Insiders say the dispute is due to vested interest groups represented in the board trying to push different models of Boeing aircraft without looking at the airline’s immediate needs or longterm sustainability. The indecision, coupled with the grounding of one of the airline’s 757s in Shanghai this weekend, has worsened the company’s financial crisis.

Some members of the airline’s board of directors are putting pressure on management to lease-purchase a brand new Boeing 777, while others are pushing for a 737. Still others want the airline to buy a 767 off Air Brunei. “We have been unable to decide on the matter,” says RINAC Managing Director MP Khanal. “One thing or another keeps us from meeting and deciding on the issue.” Khanal refused to comment on differences within the board.

Frequent grounding of its 757s for technical reasons has dented the airline’s image and resulted in colossal losses. The airline’s two jets are overstretched up to 15 hours a day each, limiting maintenance time. One of the jets needs a C-check in April and the airline needs a replacement jet for two months anyway. In effect, the airline is now looking at leasing two jets in the immediate future. But airline officials believe there are inferior motives to go for leases instead of purchasing a plane. “We have warned them. If they lease an aircraft instead of purchasing one, we will not allow it to fly,” says Capt YK Bhandari, Chairman of National Airline Pilots Association (NAPA).

One board member, Basanta Mishra, denies there are differences among the directors. “It’s nothing like that, it’s just that we haven’t come to a final decision yet,” he told us. For management it is exactly why the situation is worrying: by dragging things till the last moment, the airline has in the past been forced to sign faulty or sometimes fraudulent lease agreements.

By the time the airline’s board met last week, it was worrying: by dragging things till the last moment, the airline has in the past been forced to sign faulty or sometimes fraudulent lease agreements. The airline wants a ‘paradigm shift’ in service. Anil Shah, the man who led the consumer banking team at Standard Chartered Nepal has recently moved to Nabil Bank Limited as General Manager where he wants to bring about a “paradigm shift” in service, Nepal Times spoke to him about the retail financing wave that is sweeping the sector.

No foreign investment please, we’re Nepali

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Last week’s issue of this paper was heavy with opinion on foreign investment in media and competition. This week, let’s look beyond just media to foreign investment in general.

Nepal commits to foreign investment at every meeting with multilateral agencies. But government plans never fail to mention how we should be investment friendly. After the WTO entry and agreement to every free trade zone that emerges, Nepal has now committed itself to allowing foreign investment in sectors still reserved to the domestic including industries, companies, consultants and many other businesses and services have been asked to be ready to face foreign competition.

The reality is that we never like to give up our small domelands that churn our products and services that can satisfy foreign competitors. But we are not able to provide suitable alternatives. How many local ad agencies folded up after foreign companies were allowed to enter the market.

We talk about riding the global economy, but are not been able to leave tradition behind. These range from fixing our unique Bikram calendar, having a financial year that begins and ends in different days each year. The communication system, office hours and days and 3x7 working environment of the future will only support international systems. Online airline bookings to mobile banking services will not

Bigger banking pie

Nepali Times: How come all banks are suddenly fixated on retail banking?

Anil Shah: Four years ago when I talked about consumer banking as the engine of growth for banking in Nepal, people in my bank and others outside raised their eyebrows. Today, they don’t bat an eyelid and say retail banking is their area of focus. The thing is, with the proliferation of banks there has been a tremendous reduction in margins and yield in corporate banking. Prevailing uncertainties in the socio-economic condition has lead to stagnation if not a contraction of the corporate sector. The pie was staying the same, or even shrinking, and the number of players who wanted a slice was increasing. That is when we decided to look for a new pie altogether: retail financing. Look at the market today, and almost everyone has the same idea.

It mustn’t have been easy in the beginning. Quite right, initially it was quite a task to get even my bank to buy the idea. The dynamics of retail banking are very different from the traditional banking that everyone was doing, so we had to sell the idea internally first. It had to be large scale otherwise it just wasn’t worth it. Then we had to change the mindset of the consumers. Customers used to laugh when we offered a loan to buy a car. They said their friends would laugh at them. We had to change the culture of saving today to enjoy later into enjoying today and paying later.

Now that you have moved to Nabil, what are your plans?

Many years ago I worked in Nabil bank as a trainee. It was my first exposure to banking and the experience that I had during that tenure was the reason why I chose banking as a career. So for me it is like a homecoming. Nabil Bank is the first joint venture bank in Nepal, it has amassed unmatched experience and market insight. Others may have been the first movers in consumer banking, but Nabil was the first to raise the bar in the overvalued travel business in Nepal. A few decades ago, it has effectively built its strength both on the asset and liability side. The bank has made a major investment in technology and is poised for migrating to a worldclass banking platform. So, Nabil Bank is poised for unprecedented growth.

With so many banks, the competition must be telling. Being the first joint venture bank in Nepal, Nabil has solid foundations and a strong customer relationship. In the last 19 years, the bank has grown consistently to retain its premier position in the industry. However, today Nabil’s main strength is its people. When I talk to the staff here I see in each and every one of them the desire to raise the benchmark, to deliver more than just what is expected and now we have all the tools to do just that. And regardless of what resources others may have Nabil’s human resource will be the differentiating factor.

But other banks say the same thing, what is your unique selling point? You are right, there are banks that tout their international linages to banks that flaunt their strong local roots. At Nabil we aren’t centered on ourselves, our origin or roots, but on our stakeholders: customers, regulators, shareholders and staff. It is this focus on service that drives us to search for ways to meet our entire gamut of our customer’s financial needs. With the migration to our new banking platform nearing completion, we are poised to leverage on the unvailed years of experience and strong balance sheet to make that paradigm shift towards delivering unique customer satisfaction with all our products and services.
Sadhus are enigmas to me, living the mystery of ancient questions that have no answers. Tricksters, derelicts, madmen, charlatans, wanderers, mystics and yogis, their boldly painted bodies confront us with essential questions at the heart of existence. I found them wandering through crowded polluted urban centres begging, in villages and in what is left of forest and mountain pilgrimage trails. Like walking mysteries of the human soul, for me, sadhus provoke the question, who am I? What do I need, what really is important and the more ancient pre-settled desire to wander in search of god. Most importantly, they remind us that the answer for all things only lies within our own elusive hearts.

In my adopted home of Kathmandu, some sadhus survive primarily off alms made from allowing tourists to photograph them. They are a spectacle and love to play their assigned role in the illusion or drama of society. Their masks are thickly painted on their naked bodies. Sadhus have formally abandoned conventional time; their world is dense with its own complex politics, social hierarchy, taboos and customs, often making access challenging. Volatile and unpredictable, spontaneous photography of sadhus can actually be dangerous. You can easily be trampled or attacked if you immerse yourself in a naga baba procession after a mass Khumba Mela bathing. Or, without permission from a Mahant to work inside an Akhara, be accused of being a spy and have to answer to a sadhu tribunal. There’s no such thing as achieving photographic acceptance within the sadhu mandala. For me, photographing at ritual time is always the most dynamic and fluid. Once rapport has been established, a camera is tolerated, often with a sense of lila, or maya, play and illusion. It took repeated visits over many seasons and melas to occasionally reach this level.

My initial inexplicable attraction to the sadhu world was mostly visual. As a photographer, I loved how they allowed their bodies to become symbols of the sacred—from walking around naked to remind us of our naked selves, to wearing ash to remind us what our bodies become, to dreadlocks to remind us of our natural wild natures devoid of social convention. Their bodies were texts, which spoke volumes regarding sacred symbolism.

Sadhus force us to ask: what do we need, what is really important, who am I?

THOMAS KELLY
The book, Sadhus Cuerpos Pintados by Thomas Kelly has just been published by Taller Experimental Querpos Pintados LTD, Santiago, Chile. Kelly’s colour prints from the book will be on display at Indigo Gallery at an exhibition titled ‘Sadhus: The Great Renouncers’ from 13-29 February. A group of Ram Bhakti Sadhus will be playing bhajans from 5:00-6:30 PM on 13 February at Indigo Gallery.

is used to tell stories. As the sadhus work toward an egoless state, they become the very symbols they have painted whether it be Shiva, Vishnu or Ram. The colors refer to esoteric inner visions and possible alchemical states of consciousness. The real goal of a sadhu is to achieve an attitude of non-attachment and transcendence of the physical body.

As a photographer, I sometimes like to hide behind my lens, become invisible. Yet for sadhus, it is their outwardly visible, the powerful symbols of the divine they paint on their bodies, which help them not to become invisible, but to transcend self. Disturbing, annoying, inspiring, exasperating, irrational, wise and powerful, photographing sadhus is like photographing a living question that people have forgotten to ask.

Thomas L. Kelly (picture, above, left) first came to Nepal in 1978 as a Peace Corps Volunteer and has since worked as a photo-activist, documenting the struggles of marginalised people and disappearing cultural traditions all over the world. He has researched and photographed the books: Fallen Angels: Sex Workers of South Asia, Tibet: Reflections from the Wheel of Life, The Hidden Himalayas, Kathmandu: City on the Edge of the World.
Win-win situation

DEEPESH SHRESTHA

W
t whether the country has made any overall 
hits post-1990 or not is always a subject of debate. But the one area that holds itself up well to scrutiny is Nepali music. Initially supported only by Radio Nepal, Nepal Television and a few private recording studios, the world of Nepali music has now blossomed to nearly 35 radio stations, 6 television channels, approximately 50 distribution companies and innumerable recording studios.

In the old days, a singer’s job was literally hand-to-mouth. The situation has taken an about turn today: there are Nepali musicians and singers like Ram Krishna Dhusal and Nabin K Bhattacharyya who command such a following that a single album of eight songs sells upto Rs 800,000 in the legitimate music market.

Radio airplay and specifically, the Hits FM Music Awards, has had much to do with the success of new artists and the continued promotion of new ones. Hits FM was certainly not the first to hand out awards to outstanding musicians, but when it began seven years ago, it initiated a trend that allowed musicians to concentrate on quality studio recordings. The popular Kathmandu-based station hit upon the idea of creating a unique platform for promotion of new ones. Hits FM Music Awards, has had much to do with the success of new artists and the continued promotion of new ones. Hits FM was certainly not the first to hand out awards to outstanding musicians, but when it began seven years ago, it initiated a trend that allowed musicians to concentrate on quality studio recordings.

The 7th Close-Up Hits FM Music Awards is on 18 February at the Birendra International Convention Centre. The event will be telecast live from 3PM onwards by Nepal TV and Hits FM 91.2.

Everyone wins with this award show for Nepali music

Sambhujeet Baskota is by far the most popular and prolific music director in Bollywood

In a country where all commercial movies are musicals, the name Sambhujeet Baskota has become synonymous with Nepali movie scores. As a film music director, his career has spanned a decade and a half and his music has featured in over 200 movies with an astounding total of 2,000 songs.

Sambhujeet proved himself a singer and composer even before entering the world of original soundtracks when he did Aayu in 1990. From then on, there was no looking back. He quickly established himself as a composer for (and eventually ousted) Ranjiteet Gajmer who dominated the field at the time. Today, perhaps no other name is as firmly set in Nepali music history.

It is not hard to understand why Sambhujeet maintains such popularity. The secret behind his success is versatility. Sambhujeet’s songs range from serious to light-hearted and over the years artists ranging from Narayan Gopal and Tara Devi to Nabin K Bhattacharyya and Nalina Chitrakar have sung his compositions. He has proved his genius at creating songs that appeal to the masses, often mixing all types of music to get the effect he is looking for. He prefers incorporating traditional folk melodies into his work, but fans claim that he manages to come up with something new and interesting each time.

Even so, some are critical of his mix-and-mash approach. Perhaps most controversial is his use of foreign tunes in his music, which some may take as proof that his creations are not original. His reputation as a ‘music machine’ also provokes sceptical of the quality of music made in such a hurry. Perhaps most controversial is his use of foreign tunes in his music, which some may take as proof that his creations are not original. His reputation as a ‘music machine’ also provokes some may take as proof that his creations are not original.

Despite his critics, it is obvious that Sambhujeet has firmly established himself in the Nepali music scene. He recently started singing again and is always busy with new projects. He is currently the director of the music department of the Royal Nepal Academy and has two songs nominated for the category of Best Song Originaly Recorded for a Motion Picture Soundtrack in the upcoming 7th Close-Up Hits FM Music Awards. 

Melody king

KIRAN PANDEY
HITS FM MUSIC AWARDS 2060

Nominees

BEST NEW ARTIST
Aastha
Music Link
Ravi Bajracharya
Shital/Shuvani
The Destiny

BEST SONG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
Helutresser - Da Nepaydaz
One Day at a Time - Robin n Lozua;
Peace and Harmony (People of the world) - Dimple feat.
Full Circle
Strike Back Again - The Shadows
Tell Me Why - Steel Wheels

FOLK RECORD OF THE YEAR
Dhan Khayo Dhan Char Iey - Arun Upalayaka
Raato Kapaai - Ram Pandey - Lochan Bhattarai
Ross Bagarma - Hari Thapa and friends
Saati Jyu - Tulsi Parajui
Tyo Paani Banma - Prakash Acharya

FOLK ALBUM OF THE YEAR
Banepa Bardisar - Prem Kumar Lama/ Megh Bahadur Lama/Anu/Verma and friends
Hile Bajaur - Ram Bahadur Nepal, Sarala Rai
Jhalhal Aankha Ma - Tulsi Parajui
Klaun Dahine Naad - Ram Thapa
Sanka Namana - Birhari Karki/Sindu Malla

BEST SONG ORIGINALLY RECORDED FOR A MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
Bagachha Maa - Sukha Dukha - Sambhujeyti Baskota
Chhik Ko Sane - Anurika Lobhi Mann Paapi/ Ram Thapa
Dhakinshau - Lahana - Sachin Singh
Samjaney - Zidd - Sambhujeyti Baskota
Susu Ley - Maya Namara - Suresh Adhikari

BEST PERFORMANCE BY A GROUP OR DUO WITH VOCALS
Karma Band - Hukka Meri
Mongolian Hearts - Timi Deka
Mukhi & Revakhi - Bujha Deu
Robin n Lozua - Bhoo Ma Bhuyo
THE AVE - Lukan Deu

BEST POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE (FEMALE)
Mamta Dipbam - Ke Yo Maya Ho
Nalina Chitrakar - Pani Pani
Poonam Singh - Mandaina Mann
Sukmit Gurung - Saath Rahane Cha
Sunita Subba - Timi Le Yesari

BEST POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE (MALE)
Deepak Bajracharya - Ritu
Nabin K. Bhattarai - Eh Jhari
Nima Rumba - Preeti Basyo
Sanjeev Singh - Timi Tadiye
Sugam Pokharel - Bhaneko Hun Male

BEST VOCAL COLLABORATION
Achut Dawadi/Sapna Shree - Sapani Ma Aye
GP Featuring Shya Thee - Malai Voe Deu
Uday/Manila Shree/Suying - Hamo Bajje Le
Ram Baral/Sapna Shree - Uddal Chau Ki

BEST FEMALE VOCAL PERFORMANCE
Devika Singh - Timi Deka
Kunti Moktan - Mani Ko Deuta
Manila Sotang - Bhijyo Sirani
Sapna Shree - Sagar Baru
Sharmila Bardewa - Dina Ta Deu

BEST MALE VOCAL PERFORMANCE
Deep Shrestha - Eutai Bato
Jagdish Samal - Samjhera
Karna Das - Timro Mero
Ram Krishna Dhakal - Eklo Parani
Sishir Yogi - Saarangi

SONG OF THE YEAR
Bistarai Chhayo - Naresh Dev Pant
Maanche ko Khoji - Dr. Vishwanath “Prem” Sarangi/ Ta Madhan P. Ghimire
Shweeandhu Aanika Haru - Dinesh Adhikari
Thula Thula Mahal - Karna Das

RECORD OF THE YEAR
Hukka Meri - Karma Band
Male Chhyekyo - Jash Kumar
Mafo Samau - Anand Karle
Pan Sapani/Gym Kathai - Prakash Ojha
Thula Thula Mahal - Karna Das

ALBUM OF THE YEAR
Aasthakata - Uday/Mama Sotang
Nabin - Nabin K. Bhattarai
Purano Dunga - Karna Das
Reason - Jash Kumar
Shooniya - 1 MB

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Romantic love may be the most pervasive myth in Western culture

JAMES PARK

Romance is a cultural invention, not a natural phenomenon. We have been so deeply indoctrinated into the romantic myth that we have no awareness of the process of emotional programming that created our romantic responses. Popular culture provides the main ways we learn how to ‘fall in love’. Movies, television, popular songs, novels and magazines all train our feelings into the wonderful delusion of romance. Our romantic games would be harmless if everyone knew that romantic love is a fantasy feeling.

Most of us emerged from childhood believing that romantic love is a natural phenomenon. When we ‘fall in love’, we seem to be possessed by an irresistible passion, filling our hearts. So, how could these romantic feelings be a cultural creation, invented only 800 years ago? Before the Middle Ages, some people probably experienced exaggerated, fantasy feelings close to what we now call ‘romantic love’. But such accidental emotions of personal, deluded feelings did not become the passion of the masses until the French troubadours refined and spread the emotional game of love. Who were these people— as a matter of historical fact—started the feeling that has now become a taken-for-granted phenomenon?

Temporary insanity

Romantic love is an altered state of consciousness. We seem possessed by an alien force taking over our minds. Everything seems wonderful—especially the object of our love. Our ‘spontaneous’ love reactions pull us together into a whirlpool of hope, uncontrollable, overwhelming passion. Romantic love is blind because we are really responding to our own internal fantasies, well-prepared by the romantic tradition. For years, we have been yearning for our Dream Lover. And when a close approximation appears, we project all our pent-up fantasies upon that unsuspecting victim. These experiences are really being an emotional ‘high’ lasts, but, in the long run, they are becoming. The wild,extravagant feeling of being head-over-heels in love is certainly an enjoyable delusion while that ‘high’ lasts, but should we attempt to build relationships on fantasy feelings?

James Park is an existential philosopher with a deep interest in the dynamics of love and the author of New Ways of Loving: How Authenticity Transforms Relationships.

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ONLY SHORT LISTED CANDIDATES WILL BE CALLED FOR AN INTERVIEW DURING THE WEEK OF 8-12 MARCH 2004
A battle is brewing between the United States and the World Health Organization (WHO) over sugar.

WHO met this month in Geneva to discuss proposed guidelines on diet and exercise intended to help national governments combat a seemingly inexorable global obesity epidemic. Sugar is not the only factor in obesity — high fat intake and lack of exercise also play central roles, but WHO scientists think sugar is the main culprit.

US objections to recommendations to limit sugar consumption and re-think food advertising aimed at young children are said to be based more on industry lobbying efforts than a desire to protect public health.

"It is significant that resistance from business interests, which included the sugar industry and soft drinks manufacturers with US government support, was also demonstrated when a previous WHO report in 1990 made similar recommendations intended to prevent diet-related chronic diseases," wrote Karen Norem, chair of the WHO working group in a letter to the US Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson.

The letter expresses "grave concern that the United States Government has delivered a submission which appears, in effect, to seek to stall the development of a global strategy on diet, activity and health".

No one disputes that obesity has become a serious problem. In the United States, the world's fabled country after Samoa, there are almost twice as many overweight children and three times as many overweight teenagers as two decades ago. In Britain one in five schoolchildren is overweight and one in 20 is obese.

About 300,000 US deaths a year are associated with obesity, which is generally defined as 14-18 kg overweight. One rather macabre result has been a rising demand for "triple overweights". A rather macabre result has been a rising demand for "triple overweights". One rather macabre result has been a rising demand for "triple overweights". One rather macabre result has been a rising demand for "triple overweights".

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warns that some of the same nutritional deficiencies in the underfed also afflict the overfed — two of the most common being anaemia and vitamin A deficiency, which causes widespread blindness in children under five years old. The ill effects of excess fat range from heart disease and stroke to arthritis, cancer and female infertility.

In a critique of the proposed WHO strategy, US official William Steiger contended the scientific validity of some key dietary recommendations, and called for greater "personal responsibility" in battling obesity.

"There is also an unsubstantiated focus on "good" and "bad" foods, and a conclusion that specific foods are linked to non-communicable diseases," wrote Steiger, who works in the department of health and human services. "The assertion that the heavy marketing of energy-dense foods or fast food outlets increases the risk of obesity is supported by almost no data."

This view is not shared by the American Academy of Paediatrics, which just published a study finding that "eating fast food negatively impacts the diets of American children in ways that could increase their risk for obesity". It recommends that sweetened soft drink vending machines be taken out of schools, a measure that several US states are now actively considering.

Steiger also took exception to the report's concerns about food and beverage advertising directed at young children. "In children, there is a consistent relationship between television viewing and obesity," he wrote. "However, it is not at all clear that this association is mediated by the advertising on television."

According to the Worldwatch Institute, children in the United States are bombarded with 40,000 television ads per year — one-half of which promote unhealthy food and beverages. WHO spokesperson David Porter noted that the agency's report does not advocate a ban on junk food advertising; it suggests that governments work with consumer groups and industry to develop "appropriate approaches" to marketing food to children.

"The expert report offered the best evidence available, and no one in the international scientific community has challenged the proposed population nutrient intake goals," Porter added in an email interview. The WHO global strategy does not become official until it is endorsed by member states when they meet for the UN agency's summit in May. Although the draft has garnered broad international support, the WHO executive board agreed this month to US demands for more time to comment on the final resolution. Most experts believe that running the epidemic around will require major lifestyle changes that cannot simply be enforced by the state.

On any given day in the United States, for example, one-quarter of the adult population visits a fast food restaurant. More than one-half of people get inadequate exercise. Global production of sugar has doubled in the last half century and is rising steadily, particularly in the South. World consumption of sugar now equals some 21 kg per person each year.
The Pak nuke cake
The nuclear sale saga is far from over

Any questions remain in the story of Pakistan President Gen Pervez Musharraf’s pardon this week of the criminal actions of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the country’s Father of the Bomb. Khan’s transgressions are virtually the world’s first major case of wanton spreading of the deadly knowledge and technology of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Khan is said to have sold the knowledge and technology of making nuclear weapons of mass destruction to Iran, Libya and North Korea. Khan, who confessed to leaking nuclear secrets on 4 February and was pardoned the next day, admitted to having been linked with an international underworld that buys and sells nuclear knowledge and technology for profit, even though he was not in his.

This case of proliferation of nuclear weapons is claimed to be no crime according to Pakistan’s statutes, except perhaps the violation of Official Secrets Act of 1923. But his criminal actions include the theft of state and government property, as all that was developed at Khan Research Laboratories at Kahuta obviously belonged to the Pakistan state. There is also a breach of implicit trust in the actions, for which presidential pardon has been given. Musharraf has allowed him to go scot-free.

The United States and other powers, keen on stopping the proliferation of atomic weapons of mass destruction, will not be amused. Here is a proven case of a huge-scale pillage and the buying and selling of what was the most sought after knowledge and equipment by what Washington calls “rogue states”.

One area of trouble remains unaccounted for. North Korea, which says it has eight nuclear weapons, thanks mainly to Khan’s activities and whose arsenal is a major security fear for Asia. However, two parts of the story are clear: there was absolutely no financial concern over Khan’s decisions because he could go anywhere he liked, whenever he chose to, and could spend virtually any amount, including in precious hard currency.

In India, caste attitudes still shape marriages, life chances and career opportunities. IT seems to be no exception.

India is projecting a feel-good factor about itself: its catchy phrase is “India shining”. But there are significant social groups for whom a good deal of rot lies under the shine. Since caste still operates as a defining condition in establishing marriages, social relations and access to employment, millions of ex-untouchables and other former low castes remain behind in education, employment and access to wealth.

There is widespread discrimination, and statistics show there is a broad correlation between economic situation and position within the caste hierarchy. The government may boast of economic progress and grand new development schemes such as a golden quadrilateral of highways joining major cities or plans to interlink major rivers, but it has failed to address issues such as education, caste, gender discrimination and the rural-urban gap.

The result is continued upper caste dominance in the many fields including IT. Though reservation in the private sector is nominally supported by many political parties, the private sector itself has been slow to respond. Now, in the new era of dynamic but privileged economy, most Dalits are clear that their future lies beyond the public sector.

Infosys, one of India’s leading (and Brahmin-run) software companies, did sponsor a seminar on “Contemporary Dalit Issues” in 2003, but its famous chairman Narayana Murthy only said: “we have our international compulsions.”

He warned Dalits that private companies could not afford the rigidities of the reservation system.

Similarly, though some business leaders are beginning to speak of corporate social responsibility, none have so far declared their commitment to ending caste and gender discrimination in society.

“I am not concerned about the caste of employees as long they command merit. But if it helps in the process of selection on merit, so be it,” Murthy had said at the Infosys seminar. In India, however, merit has become an ideology justifying continued upper caste monopoly.

“Merit” is contrasted not with “incompetence”, but with reservation. It is as if upper-caste monopoly in high-level jobs were a result of a genetically-coded ability to think and perform, while reservations were a “gift” presented—at the cost of slowing down efficiency, by hiring unqualified people in order to meet social justice demands.

A strong refusal to research and discuss caste has meant ignoring the heavy disadvantages in education, language, articulation and socialisation that Dalits and other low castes have to fight, not to mention evading the degree to which Indians access their jobs through caste and kin networks. India’s growing claim to a global IT presence has only exacerbated these attitudes.

If upper caste Brahmins have always seemed to live in a world of philosophy and abstraction, the electronic virtual realm of IT seems somehow especially appropriate for them. Now that some Indians from elite backgrounds are proving themselves in the world of IT, there seems to be little compulsion to broaden this, to make technological and educational achievement a truly national and universal aim.

The result has been not only a loss for the low caste majority, but India’s loss as well. In spite of vast progress, India’s presence in IT is a shallow one: there were only 38 telephone mainlines per 1,000 people in 2001, up from 6 in 1990, only 6 cellular subscribers and 6.8 Internet users out of 1,000 in 2001, up from a base of near zero.

This compared badly even with the averages for developing countries, which had risen from a similarly insignificant base to 87 telephone mainlines, 75 cellular subscribers, and 26.5 Internet users in the same period. Behind this halting progress lie several factors, including bad roads and electricity in the rural areas that hamper rural computer use. But the most striking failure of India’s development lies in the field of education.

Though literacy and school attendance have improved in the 1990s, ongoing negative attitudes of many teachers towards low-caste students have hampered efforts to change. The end result: a world of IT excluding the large majority of the population.
The absence of war is not peace
Only development protects peace once fighting stops

ANALYSIS
Mark Malloch Brown

As the United Nations last week, US Secretary of State Colin Powell and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stood together to urge swift and substantial financial support for Liberia, which is poised on a knife’s edge between the possibility of recovery and a new descent into violence. The response was gratifying, with the European Union fully backing the effort to rebuild the shattered nation. Nearly 100 countries participated in the meeting, promising Liberia more than $500 million in reconstruction aid.

Many observers saw this display of unanimity as a conspicuous contrast to the deep divisions in the world community that surrounded the situation in Iraq.

But despite global agreement on the need to seize these moments, we too often find ourselves scrambling after the fact, in ad hoc fashion, to convene willing donors and organise teams of experts and logistics to deliver urgently needed aid. Even in the best of cases, as we have seen with Liberia, where a peace accord was signed in August, this takes a perilously long time. Before the next Liberia comes along, we the world need to find a way to provide resources for peacekeeping much, much sooner.

As we look at the wider global context, it is clear that this kind of post-conflict intervention is going to be a major part of the UN’s work in the coming years. We cannot always afford to wait for gatherings of world leaders and financial pledges from donor nations.

In Liberia’s capital city of Monrovia last month, young men began to riot because full funding was not yet in place for the UN’s disarmament program. Having come to turn in weapons for a fee, some of them became violent when they discovered that the money wasn’t there to pay them. If ex-combatants are not provided with alternative civilian opportunities—and fast—many will simply pick up their guns again.

The critical importance of economic support in these ephemeral post-conflict moments has been underscored by both the successes and failures seen elsewhere in Africa, and around the world.

International organisations like the UN must have at their disposal beforehand enough financial and human resources to go beyond the tokenism that too often characterizes the international response to post-conflict societies. More is needed than a handful of combatants re-integrated, a school or two re-built, and an under-funded young government lauded abroad but unable to deliver jobs or law and order to its war-scared people at home.

Liberia and Iraq both demonstrate the need for this kind of fast-responding capacity, as 21st century geopolitics is likely to continue to be more preoccupied with nation-building intervention in the aftermath of conflict than with wars between states. The conference in New York Friday drew on the collective resources and expertise of UN agencies, the World Bank, and the major donor countries led by the United States, an impressive and effective collaboration that offers a rough framework for preparation for future post-conflict response. Having money available in advance, on standby for the inevitable, would be sound global policy.

Until that money is available, the UN and its many multilateral partners will remain collectively unprepared to aid these post-conflict societies at their moment of greatest political opportunity and economic need. We will all ultimately pay dearly, in human and financial terms, if we fail to ensure that these peace processes lead to long-term stability for societies that have already suffered for too much, for their immediate neighbours, and for the world at large.

Mark Malloch Brown, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, is the Chair of the United Nations Development Group.

Forgotten MDGs

LONDON – A new study calls for more resources to provide reproductive health care in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Adding up a, a report by The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) based in the United States and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) says that gaps in sexual and reproductive health care account for nearly one-fifth of the worldwide burden of illness and premature death, and one-third of the illness and death among women of reproductive age. It figures that closing the gap so that every woman at risk of unintended pregnancy has access to modern contraceptives would cost $3.9 billion more per year, and would save the lives of an additional 1.5 million children annually. This would also lessen induced abortions by 64 percent, reduce ill-health related to pregnancy and preserve 27 million years of healthy life, it says. Providing contraception to women must be at the centre of the efforts, the report says.

The first two of the Millennium Development Goals that relate to eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and achieving universal primary education will be supported because smaller families allow more investment in nutrition and health, and because smaller families can invest more in education. The next four goals of promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases will clearly be easier to achieve with greater stress on sexual and reproductive health care. The seventh goal of ensuring environmental sustainability can be advanced by avoiding unwanted births and therefore helping to stabilize rural areas. The last stated goal of developing a global partnership for development could bring affordable prices for drugs to treat HIV/AIDS.
Dying in Thailand

Samacharpatra, February 9

Nepalis imprisoned in Thai jails have a dark and hopeless future. In an appeal letter to fellow Nepalis, they are asking for pledges of support to bring them back home. “The situation is grave for all of us. There is no medicine supply. We are given meagre meals. We may die if this continues,” says the appeal letter signed by 45 Nepali inmates. Their desperation to return home is so apparent that they would rather spend the rest of their lives in Nepal’s prisons than die in Thailand. “We will be indebted to Nepal’s government if it helps repatriate us from here,” the Nepal inmates said in the letter.

Four Nepalis including Harka Bahadur Pun and Hari Bahadur Gurung have died inside the cells of Phitsanulok and Lamyangai jails in Thailand. More than three dozen Nepalis are serving long term jail sentences including life imprisonment. Bangel Ghale has been imprisoned for the last 21 years. All are accused of drug trafficking, but most say they were framed.

Most Nepali prisoners cannot afford medical treatment at the hospitals where they are asked to pay for the check-ups. The unhealthy conditions and inappropriate supply of bedding and clothing means their health is deteriorating. “We have to sleep on the floor all the time, with no bedsteads. They don’t even provide us tooth pastes and soaps,” says the letter. Some are now asking in Thai prisons that the government signs an extradition treaty so they can come home. Several countries including Nigeria, Australia and Estonia have signed such treaties with the Thai government and are able to repatriate their prisoners. More than 300 Nigerians were able to go home last year, but the inmates say Nepal has done nothing to help.

“We had discussed with Law Minister months ago, but there has been no progress so far,” admits Madan Kumar Bhattarai, spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Meanwhile, the unit at MFA looking after the Nepal Royal Embassy in Thailand.

In a democracy, we need basic understanding and agreement. Unfortunately, we have entangled ourselves in triffles, not in principles. Witness the Ganeshman vaccination, the Bhartarai faction and Girja faction within the Nepali Congress. They never allowed us to proceed with confidence and trust.

“We admit our past mistakes and will not repeat it. It is human to err. The kind of repentance you see in our comrades from Mechi in the east to Mahakali in the west makes me believe that we will not repeat the same mistakes. Right now we are sandwiched between two armed groups. On one side there is the force of repression and on the other the Maoist violence. We are walking on a knife’s edge. We can’t help protesting repression because we have always fought for democracy. We are also bearing the brunt of the violence of radical communists. To correct regression, we have demanded reinstatement of parliament. Once that is done, it will form a government. That is how the constitution can come back into play. The situation is that the anti-monarchists are continuing their movement against the royal takeover with an agreement. If someone can show an alternative way through which the constitution can be activated, we will be receptive to the idea.

But without a convincing alternative we have to continue demanding restoration of parliament. The government says general elections would be the best way to bring the constitution back on track. But can elections be held now? As long as Maoist violence remains, there will be no peace. In the absence of peace, there can be no polls. But since we are a democratic party we will not run away from the ballot box.

In his Nepali royal address His Majesty King Gyanendra called on all forces who believe in multiparty democracy to work towards an urgent restoration of law and order to create the conditions for general elections to be held, and the handing over of executive powers to the peoples’ representatives. At a time when many political parties have been doubting His Majesty’s role and intentions in governance, the royal address allayed all suspicions and doubts.

Rajdhani, 10 February

In his Nepali royal address His Majesty King Gyanendra called on all forces who believe in multiparty democracy to work towards an urgent restoration of law and order to create the conditions for general elections to be held, and the handing over of executive powers to the peoples’ representatives. At a time when many political parties have been doubting His Majesty’s role and intentions in governance, the royal address allayed all suspicions and doubts.

For now, the Communication Ministry seems to have won over the Defence Ministry to allow new FM stations to operate. Communications Ministry secretary Mahendra Raj Poudel says the FM stations that have already been given licenses will be allowed to begin broadcasts. The Defence Ministry had reportedly asked that new FM stations be stopped until the frequency issue was resolved. The fate of more than 30 new FM stations remain uncertain after the Defence Ministry’s directive. Of these, 15 are community-based stations. President of Community Radio Broadcast Association Raghuram Mainali said that the new operators will now have to make up for lost time.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The days of Monarchy being seen but not heard, watching the people’s difficulties but not addressing them and being a silent spectator to their tear-stained faces are over.”

— King Gyanendra, during a public felicitation at King Mahendra Stadium in Nepalgunj, 8 February
Himal Khabarpatrika, Jan 15-31

Even though the government has branded them terrorists, Maoist leaders walk around openly in the parts of midwestern Nepal they consider their base areas. This was evident during ceremonies held on 19 January to announce their Bheri-Karnali Autonomous Region in Jungthapachaur in Jajarkot. Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara attended that meeting as well as the one on 9 January in Thawang in Rolpa announcing a ‘Magarat Self-government Region’ which includes Dang, Lumbini, Kapilbastu, Tanahu and Syangja. Maoist supremo Prachanda himself was supposed to attend this meeting, but didn’t. Central Committee member and head of the western command, Postbahadur Bogati (Comrade Diwakar) was the chief guest at the Thawang meeting. Others, including the head of the Maoist ‘peoples army’ western division, Nanda Kishore Pun (Pasang), and politburo members Rabindra Shrestha and Pampha Bhusal were also present, dressed in camouflage fatigues.

The Maoists stated that they held sway over the region and could attack military bases there at any time. “Please be assured, we have ordered our forces to shoot down any government helicopter that comes this way,” Pasang told the assembled crowd. The Maoists also announced that the declaration of the autonomous region was part of the effort to capture central power and to have a unified republic. Santosh Buda from Rolpa was nominated chairman of the Magarat Autonomous Region, and declared that government aircraft were banned from its airspace. The Maoist ‘Radio Peoples Republic’ organised a press conference where Mahara told visiting journalists that the Maoists were getting ready for a decisive victory against the fractious ‘old regime’. Mahara said: “America is trying its best to get into Nepal. Our neighbours China and India don’t like this.”

After the speeches, there were cultural programs all night. Watching were villagers who had been brought specially for the event, some from as far as seven days walk away.
Outside my room. The glass of tea, no doubt, gives me the impression at the time, as I am waiting for the water to boil. I take it in the morning, and to a great extent, it is a hot glass of tea at that hour when the temperature is hovering near the freezing point gives him some warmth. I open the window just wide enough to put the glass out for him. He comes, stands at attention, salutes and takes the glass. Some of them ask me before they accept the tea whether I have had my tea. “Have you taken your tea, sir?” “I have prepared another glass of tea for myself. After you finish please put the glass on the window sill.” Before I take tea I drink a glass of lemon water. Since a few days I have given up taking tea with the lemon water as precaution against diabetes. I take only lemon water, followed by a glass of tea without sugar—the finest Darjeeling Happy Valley special tea. If I add only two spoonfuls of sugar in my tea, I could feel sufficiently happy, contented, indulged and gratified—as if I have gone through some aesthetic experience. Even without sugar, the gratification is marginally released, this morning’s glass is a bliss. Milk, however is not up to the mark. Water, of course, is all right. Till 6:30 I try to read—just try—don’t make too much progress, day-dreaming. I feel my mind is also not alert these days. I can’t concentrate, and serious ideas baffle me—and sometimes even consecutive narration—a little complicated leaves me panting trying to catch up with the movement of a story. I hope this mental deterioration is temporary, produced by almost solitary condition of the present imprisonment. After 6:30 till the arrival of a host of policemen undergoing training here descend on me to do the cleaning till it is about 7:30—I try to catch BBC, Voice of America for news and if this is any good music I listen to it. Unfortunately one doesn’t get good music at this hour. When the police trainees do the sweeping of the room and the compound I do the walking. The tidying process takes about ½ hour. The flower pots are watered, the floor of the compound is meticulously swept and sprinkled with water to settle the dust. My room is also very carefully tidied, windows are cleaned—in short they make everything clean andships shape. The other day, Rosa remarked that I would develop never-to-be-satisfied habit in the matter of the household cleanliness if I have to live long in prison in this condition. She said that we don’t have so many men to look after the compound and its maintenance. Neu said that the Chabahil house was also clean, thus it was not so overdone as here. At about 8 GM comes into my room which has a small kitchenette where he prepares his breakfast and boils our milk. He boils drinking water for me also. For breakfast, he takes milk with cornflakes, a glass of milk with coffee, some fruits and cheese. I take a glass of milk. Since yesterday I started taking one boiled egg and two slices of bread. I don’t think I can continue this, because I prefer just a glass of milk for my breakfast.

Rice festival in LA

The United Nations has declared 2004 the International Year of Rice in honour of a food grain which is staple to more than three billion people, most of them in Asia. The growing and eating of rice are so fundamental to life in Asia that rice epitomises food, and by extension, symbolic life itself, as well as fertility and social continuity.

The Art of Rice: Spirit and Sustenance in Asia

A travelling exhibition on the worldwide rice culture currently at the Fowler Museum at the University of California in Los Angeles has a section devoted to Nepal’s Tharus.

“The Art of Rice, Spirit and Sustenance in Asia celebrates the cultivation of rice in many Asian cultures, and displays images and folk art from these cultures, which includes the Tharu of Nepal,” says UC LA in its introduction to the exhibition.

This magnificent travelling exhibition examines the interplay between rice and culture through a study of an astonishing array of visual art, including works from China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Nepal and other Asian countries,” says UCLA in its introduction to the exhibition.

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The Art of Rice: Spirit and Sustenance in Asia

Til 25 April 2004 at UCLA’s Fowler Museum.

http://www.fmch.ucla.edu/incEngine/
Golf for beginners II

Last week (#182) we looked at some basic terms for a golf course’s features: tees, fairways, roughs, bunkers, hazards, out of bounds, and greens. Let us continue:

Some basic terms for your score

Score Card & Score – A printed form where you fill in your score on each hole. For each of the 18 holes you play, you write down the number of times you hit the ball and add on the penalties for being in a hazard breaking the rules of the game.

At the end of the round of golf (18 holes), you total it all up and that is your score. The lowest score wins.

What is par? – Par can be used in different ways, but basically it means the “ideal” score for a particular hole or golf course. The par of a particular hole is usually dependent on the length of the hole, and generally there are three groups of lengths. Short holes require you to get the ball from the tee into the hole in 3 shots. These are known as par threes. Medium length holes are par fours. Long holes are par fives.

If you get the ball from the tee in 4 shots or less, then you have scored par on that hole.

A standard golf course of 18 holes could have four holes of par 3, four holes of par 4, and ten par 5’s, for a total of a par of 72. If you have scored 72 after playing 18 holes, then you have played your 18 hole round to par.

Hole in one – Every golfer’s dream – hitting the ball straight from the tee into the hole. (Yes, you would also call it a hole in one). Americans like to refer to a Hole in One as an "Albatross." It is very rare to get an albatross.

Eagle – Two strokes below par. For example completing a par four with a score of 2, or a par five with a score of 3.

Birdie – One below par. So, if you score 3 on a par four, you have had a birdie on that hole.

Par – the standard for the hole

Bogey – One over par. On a par 3 if someone plays 4 shots to put in the hole then he has had a bogey on that hole.

Double Bogey – Two over par for the hole

Triple Bogey – Three over par

Quadraple Bogey – Four over par – common score for beginners.

What is a Handicap? – A handicap is not a disability, it is one of the most interesting aspects of golf. In simple terms, a person’s handicap is determined from an average of his score over par for a number of 18 holes rounds of golf. So if a person regularly scores 80 on a par 72 course, his handicap would be 8.

Handicaps allow players of very different skill levels to play competitively against each other. A beginner’s handicap is zero.

Are we ready now? – Armed with this terminology, you no longer need to be hesitant on joining in that conversation between a group of golfers, or driving down to the golf course and taking your first lesson.

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

Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance (KEVA)

KEVA is a non profit organisation formed with the sole objective of reducing the air pollution problem in Kathmandu Valley through the expansion of Electric Vehicle (EV) use. It has been working in coordination with different public and private organizations to strengthen the technical and business aspects of EVs.

KEVA is in line with that, KEVA calls for investors interested in investing in the Electric Vehicle Industry (electric three wheelers, trolley bus, trains, ropeways, electric cars, etc) to contact at the following telephone number during office hours (9 am to 5 pm) or send an email. Please contact by February 70, 2004 in the included in KEVA’s upcoming programs.

Contact: Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance (KEVA)
Tel: 446707, email: keva@winnc.org.np
Web address: http://www.kea.org.np/

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

3rd NADA Auto Show 2004

There wouldn’t be any doubt saying that the transport sector plays a vital role in the economic growth of a country. Nepal being a landlocked country has witnessed a tremendous growth and change in the automobile sector. As per the statistics from different sources, the automobile sector in Nepal provides employment opportunities directly and indirectly to more than 20,000 people. Of the not in revenue collected by the government 14% is collected from the automobile sector.

However to display demonstrate and disseminate news of the latest automobiles in the country a forum was utmost needed. This initiative was taken by Global Expositions and Management Service Pvt. Ltd. for organizing the 1st Auto Show in September 1998. Followed by 2nd Auto Show in the year 2000. This time the name of the event has been changed to the 3rd NADA Auto Show. In this show the Nepal Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) has actively participated in the organisation and management of the event.

The 3rd NADA Auto Show 2004, perhaps the largest show in Nepal, covering around 3500 sq. m. will set the pace for automotive business in years to come.

The glitz and glamour of vehicles the hardw cne business of auto components and wide range of servicing, machinery and accessories will attract manufacturers, dealers, distributors and buyers from different parts of Nepal.

EXHIBITORS:

All Ltd. Pvt. Ltd. (TVE)
Arnapanas Associates Pvt. Ltd.
Arnapanas Trade Center
Arnapanas Industries/Concept Ent. India Pvt. Ltd.
Arun Intercontinental Traders
Avio International Pvt. Ltd.
Bhunthe Energie 8 Solhas
Bhaum Auto Parts
Bruton Trading
Briskies India Ltd.
Bright Orient Ltd. (P) Ltd.
China Motors Pvt. Ltd.
Continental Trading Ent. Pvt. Ltd.
Cube/Intercontinental Pvt. Ltd.
Dugar Brothers & Sons
Engine Treatment Pvt. Ltd.
Eutek Gears Pvt. Ltd.
Franchiti Oil Company Pvt. Ltd.
Gabriel Shois
Goralwalla Rubber Udyog Ltd.
Hansika/Huleshand & Co. P. Ltd.
Hendraker-Petroleum Corporation Ltd.
Hino India Pvt. Ltd.
Hulus Motors Pvt. Ltd.
Mahavir Trade Centre
Maruti Auto Deco
Mohan Helmees Pvt. Ltd.
Morang Auto Works
Narwal Motors Ltd.
National Motors
Narmin Intl Traders Pvt. Ltd.
Nepal Overseas Trading Concern
Padma Shree Trading Pvt. Ltd.
Pratap Motor Accessories Traders
Premier Insurance Ltd.
Quoqiland India
RedBluca International
Radio City Car Auto
Ramiharco Batteries Ltd.
Royal Trading Incorporation
Sinhavas Intl Trading Concern
Spradick Trading Pvt. Ltd.
SundaramAuro Abarhatar World Pvt Ltd.
Standard Chartered Bank Ltd.
Star International Ltd.
Sundaram Fasteners Limited
Super Circo Auto Limited
Surge Distributors Pvt. Ltd.
Sykaar Co. Ltd.
The Genosh Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.
Union Finance Ltd.
VAPP Training Center
Vega Auto Accessories Pvt. Ltd.

The event will be held for 5 days and is expected to draw about Fifty Thousand Business and Quality visitors during the entire exhibition period. Without doubt, 3rd NADA Auto Show 2004 will certainly be the First Mega Event of the year.

More than 70 exhibitors
Participation of all Leading Brands
Launchings of New Models
Seminars/Talk Programs
Classed Cars on Display
Food festival

Feb. 16th: Open for Business Visitors & Invitee only
**Bad Elemente: Chinese Rebels from Los Angeles to Beijing Ian Buruma Phoenix, 2003 Rs 850**

Travelling through the US, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China, Buruma tells the personal stories of Chinese rebels who dare to stand up to their rulers. From the exiles of Tiananmen to the hidden Christians in rural China, he brings alive the human dimension to their struggles and reveals the most secretive aspects of China, for which no Western account exists. Buruma tells the personal stories of Chinese rebels who dare to stand up to their rulers. From the exiles of Tiananmen to the hidden Christians in rural China, he brings alive the human dimension to their struggles and reveals the most secretive aspects of China, for which no Western account exists.

**The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King**

The journey has ended, and what a ride it’s been. The three-picture Lord of the Rings epic is now complete after three quick years, and it seems like a whirlwind. After three quick years, and it seems like a whirlwind.

**Return isn’t just a triumph—it’s also a celebration.**

For three-plus hours, it entertains, enthralls and awes. Its special-effects artistry is astonishing, puts other trilogies to shame. Without spilling any beans, be advised that it’s the kind of payoff that makes you joyous to be a film fan—or could reawaken the fan that’s been dormant within you after too many overheated Hollywood tamashas.

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**The Return of the King**

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

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ROYAL ADDRESS: King Gyanendra delivering his address at a civic felicitation ceremony in Nepalgunj on 8 February. Queen Komal is also seen in the picture.

OM SHANTI: Ishwor Gurung of Namaste Band at the sets of his new music video, Mumi, at Maitidevi on 7 February.

LOVE LETTERS: Students of Tri Chandra College writing love letters on Wednesday, 11 February, for a competition to mark Valentine’s Day.

UNIFIED COMMAND: Reuters photographer Gopal Chitrakar being questioned by security forces during the disposal of a suspected bomb at the Nepal Telecommunications building in Jawalakhel on Wednesday, 11 February.

NO VISORS: Traffic police dismantling the visor from a motorcycle helmet on Tuesday, 10 February. The rule is being enforced for security reasons.
The essence of chicken

Full the various species of jungle fowl that mankind has domesticated over the course of its history, none have had such a profound impact on human civilization as the factory-bred broiler. Take our own country, where the chicken may not have the same status and flamboyance as the national bird, the drake, or the national bird-in-waiting, the monal, but our poultry industry has almost as many patriotic songs written in its honour as those rare and resplendent pheasants. For example, the popular ballad, “An Ode to a Deceased Cock,” goes:

Rato blake kwao nave... Sateniko nama gari Taako maile khaye Hey, boina male chaureko Same-same dhuna dharna Jhuto kuro chhaina boleko!

The essence of chicken

I happened to see a six-year-old boy, his mouth agape, staring at a broiler, which he had caught in the act of pecking at the feeding trough. He was riveted. What he saw was new, and his mind was being awakened to the mysteries of the world. This is the essence of chicken.

Some of you more alert readers will have noticed that chickens have been on the rise lately. Prominent members of the poultry community were invited this week to the Meet the Press program at the Reporters’ Pub where they spoke up on a wide range of issues. The Fowl Times: Mr. Chicken, sir, we have eye-witness reports that you actually crossed a filthy road twice this morning. Why did you do that?

Chicken McNugget: Because I am a dirty doublecrosser. Harharharhar. Just joking.

FE: As a followup question, what is your response to chicks who claim that it was they who came first, and not eggs?

CM: I think they are reactionary running dog lackeys of global imperialism, and you can quote me on that. However, I don’t want to get into a polemical debate on this issue. All I want to tell the higher-up authoritarian is not to underestimate our potential to create havoc and not to make the mistake of counting us before we hatch.

Dhamalad: And that about wraps it up for today. Thank you everybody. Dinner is served.

Half the sky

She dreamed of being a doctor but Madhuri Karki’s career took a different turn. Today, she is Nepal’s first and only forest pathologist. Madhuri is our very own tree doctor.

In two decades, Madhuri has given free checkups to more trees than she can count, diagnosing their diseases and treating them. In doing so, she has raised awareness about forest conservation, which stands her in good stead today as Nepal’s only female District Forest Officer (DFO).

“My education prepared me to deal with the physical well-being of the forest, but dealing with people’s ignorance required more work,” Madhuri says wryly. She has now learnt hands-on how to use Nepal’s community forestry movement to save our woodlands.

As DFO in Bhaktapur, she has handed over most of the district’s 1,900 hectares of government land to village management committees. The result is there for all to see: the deep green slopes south of Bhaktapur.

Madhuri is said to ups and downs. In Tekot, where locals collected firewood and the army conducted exercises, she was blamed for everything that went wrong. Madhuri realised the solution lay with devotion, but for this, she had to fight the higher-up bureaucracy in Kathmandu. Her perseverance worked.

As the locals protected their forests, wild animals returned. Once, villagers attacked a marauding leopard. Madhuri tried to save its life, but the animal died. “It would have lived if there was a vet in the village,” she says. Another time, she apprehended poachers with 7kg of rare yarchagumba in Lalitpur.

“What makes me happiest is when I see central planning benefiting people in the village,” she says. If it was any other bureaucrat saying it, that remark may have been a cliché. But not with Madhuri.

(Rhadga Singh)

NEPALI SOCIETY

Nepal Times