

NEPALI Times

#183

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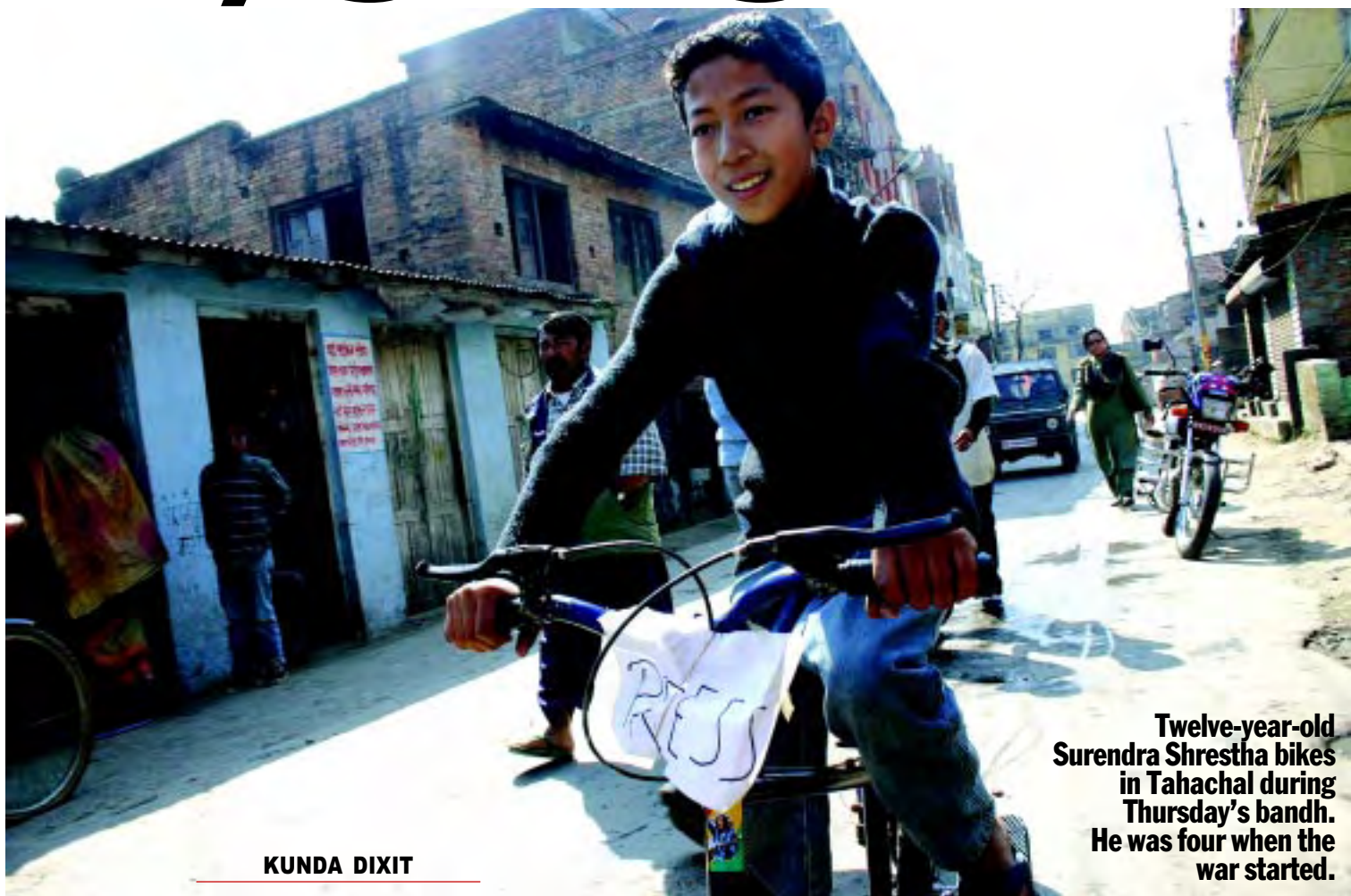
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KUNDA DIXIT

Twelve-year-old Surendra Shrestha bikes in Tahachal during Thursday's bandh. He was four when the war started.

KIRAN PANDAY

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 benefitted 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. ●

Editorial p2
Pawns

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PAWNS

One of the forces that lord over us these days seems to be able to utter a sentence without the word ‘people’ in it. The political parties and their student vanguards making tyre pyres on the streets claim they want to unshackle the people from the chains of regression, while the bemused public just look on from overhead bridges.

The Maoists have even named their eight-year war after the people. They close down schools and call for national bandhs—effectively telling the people they are not at liberty to work, to go to school or open their businesses.

At Nepalganj on Sunday, King Gyanendra used the word ‘janata’ and ‘desh basi’ more than two dozen times. He said a modern monarch couldn’t stand aside when the people have tears in their eyes.

Ultimately, all three forces know they need to gain the legitimacy and the trust of the people. That is a good sign: at least the people still seem to matter. But for the parties, the procedure with which that legitimacy is gained seems more important than actual fulfillment of the mandate. For their part, the Maoist ideologues say they are so fed up with patronage and corruption that passes for democracy that they want a new people’s 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 armour who wants to rescue the people from the clutches of corrupt politicians and ruthless rebels by redefining the role of a monarch within a multiparty polity.

The people have reacted to these promises with stoic skepticism. They have heard it all before and they have learnt to get on with their lives the best they can. In fact, as this tripartite power struggle strangles the nation, the people have shown remarkable patience and forbearance even though the leaders have always punished the people when they want to get back at their rivals.

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 drifted from anti-regression to pro-republic, but the people see it as just another slogan. Increasingly doubtful about the intentions of the king they may be, but Nepalis are still crowding to see him in Simikot and Jumla.

Longsuffering Nepalis are waiting to be heard through their elected representatives, and their patience is wearing thin. If only those who presently control their destiny could agree on the mechanism of how to let that happen. Throughout all this, it is only the people who are showing any sanity or a sense of responsibility. The tragedy is they don’t trust any of the above anymore.



Camouflaging crime
Women victims of the war are weeping silently

BARDIYA — As in all wars, Nepali women have been the most vulnerable victims of the conflict. In a country where the status of women is already one of the lowest in the world, the Maoist conflict has made women even more susceptible to abuse. Increasingly, there are reports of

GUEST COLUMN
Durga Pokhrel



forced liaison and rape leading to the problem of war babies who have been abandoned by fathers in uniform.

On a recent visit to mid- and far-western Nepal, I came across a number of women who thought men in uniform had married them, only to see their husbands vanish. Throughout the Maoist-affected districts, there are many cases of ‘marriages’ where the soldier or policeman ‘husband’ has disappeared. It is a phenomenon that needs urgent attention.

In Sanusri village of Bardiya 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 reposted. “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 a marriage, and we hope that once they hear they have children they will come back.” But I wonder. Many of the mothers don’t even know where to begin looking for their men.

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 in Thakurdwara whispers to me, referring to the abandoned wives. “I was raped.” The security forces’ men entered her house saying they were looking for Maoists, she relates to me. When they saw only women inside, they raped them.

Another 28-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 the baby she was nursing. “I just turned towards the wall and sat still,” she recalls in a low voice. They tore off her blouse and dhoti, grabbed her breast and bit it till 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 ‘disappeareds’. “If I ever see those soldiers again, I will kill them myself,” she tells me, her lips quivering with anger. She finally breaks down, and I weep with her.

There were others in Bardiya 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 from 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 have their own citizenship papers without a husband.

Worse, Nepali law denies a woman’s right to motherhood. 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, set up systems to identify 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 the commission as a powerful apex body so that it can drive through systematic legal reform and oversee its implementation.

●

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

LETTERS

THE MEDIUM IS MESSAGE

No media can survive if it doesn’t respect the sensibilities of consumers. Foreign-owned media in Nepal, therefore, can’t be un-Nepali. If foreign media investment is so important, why is the Nepal Media Society the only one so concerned? It’s a clear case of protecting their business. I only wish they did it in a more dignified way, not by insulting the intelligence of readers as Ashutosh Tiwari says in his column (‘Media is the message’, #183). The real issue behind the bogey of nationalism seems to be the media’s own insecurity about competition. From a business point of view, it seems highly unlikely that a private organisation like the APCA/Times of India Group would be motivated to invest in Nepal by anything else other than pure business interest. They thrive in giving what consumers want, not what they want. I am intrigued by what a little competition does for consumers: when I get quality at a price that is unbelievable, I’m willing

to live with foreign direct investment in the media.

Rajesh Shrestha, email

● An ironic twist to the newspaper price war is that now it has reversed—at least in Narayanghat. Last week while travelling on the Kathmandu-bound bus from the Sunauli border, news vendors there were peddling copies of *The Kathmandu Post* with the Rs 1.50 price scratched out and replaced by Rs100 for unsuspecting tourists. I realise there isn’t much profit on one and a half rupees and 50 paise coins are not in circulation here, as in India. But when I offered a two rupee note and told the boy to keep the change, the cheeky kid refused and demanded Rs 100! When I angrily dismissed the kid and his pricey paper, another foreigner in the back of the bus paid Rs 10. It looks like our papers may have slashed prices, but here in Narayanghat it is more expensive than the *International Herald Tribune*. As you say in your editorial (‘Media typhoons’,

#182) the real tragedy is that instead of simply competing in the marketplace, the two English dailies have begun viciously attacking each other editorially. Ashutosh Tiwari (‘Media is the message’, #182) left out the falling *Rising Nepal* from his discussion. One wonders what is the need for the taxpayers to subsidise a mouthpiece for the government?

Daniel Haber, Kathmandu



● It is disgusting that even a journalist of CK Lal’s stature is taking the side of Indian investors in media (‘Battle for mediacrity’, #182). Everybody knows that APCA is Indian. We Nepalis are capable of running our own parliament, our own government and our own judiciary. Why can’t we run our own media? We do not need Indians to edit and publish our newspapers. Lal and *Nepali Times* should support the cause of patriotic Nepali newspapers.

Shankar Padhye, Pokhara

● *Nepali Times* (#182) has three columnists attacking the campaign by the Nepal Media Society against foreign investment in media, plus an editorial. All accuse the anti-foreign media newspapers for being unprofessional. But how is it professional to have a one-sided portrayal of this serious debate on an issue of such national importance? Isn’t it time to practice what you preach?

Name withheld on request, email

● Thanks to CK Lal, Ashutosh Tiwari and

History just burped

Writing *On Revolution*, Marx said, “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.”

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



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 Nepalganj 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 Sharma had to rely on fellow propagandist Yubraj Gautam 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 bribed, booed or

Following the Musharraf roadmap in Nepal

bashed 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 manifest destiny to lift the ignorant masses from their collective misery. The symbol of the ruling oligarchy in Pakistan are its defence forces—omnipresent, omniscient 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 mendicants and minders 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 takeovers 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, just as his late father King Mahendra had done, and replicate Gen Ayub Khan’s Basic Democracy in Nepal in the 60s. Will it consist of holding

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 Prithbi 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 correction 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.” ●



RUDRA KHADKA/NEPALGANJ

Yubaraj Ghimire (#182) for exposing the irrational and irresponsible behaviour of the so-called ‘nationalistic’ media who are relying on extreme xenophobia to counter what is essentially a battle for the Nepali media market. Yes, *The Himalayan Times* and *Annapurna Post* have used back-channels to funnel money in Nepal. Everyone knows it, and that is why they will never succeed in Nepal because they are tainted by Indian ownership. Instead of letting them die a natural death, our own newspapers tried to exhort patriotism by using an old story on Lumbini. This controversy has exposed both Indian and Nepali-owned newspapers. The casualty has been Nepal’s media industry.
Saroj K Shakya, Kathmandu

HERD MENTALITY
Joti Giri is 100 percent right in ‘Herd Mentality’ (#180) in saying “the NRNs had their 15 minutes of fame” at the conference in Kathmandu last year. We have not seen any ‘doers’ yet. Living abroad and earning

dollars and pounds does not make you privileged Nepalis. The fact of the matter is they cook tandoori and rice in London or New York, and no one cares about them over there. Now they come to Nepal begging for recognition. Regarding the herd mentality, the laws of economics say that allocation of scarce resources results in scarce resources being utilised to its fullest. The carpet industry, garment industry, pashmina industry are all examples. Regardless, no economic law works in Nepal. What works is fallacy, as Giri points out, and self mockery of the kind NRNs created during their conference.
P Thapa, Baltimore, USA

SHAME
If life expectancy in Kathmandu is 30 years more than in Mugu, as Stephen Bezruchka states in ‘Diagnosing Nepal’ (#182), then Mugu must stand as a synonym for many other remote districts of Nepal. If the 30-year difference is a confirmed fact, then I have to exclaim:

shame on all of you who have been active in this civil war, shame on you who have been involved in humanitarian assistance during 40 years of development programs resulting in such poor records. It is hard to believe that other sectors of basic needs have reached a failure rate, so that such a huge disparity gap exists in this country. Thirdly, shame on the corrupt, both the givers and the takers. Lastly, shame on me who also has done little against it. This is a scandal.
Michael Griesbaum, Kathmandu
LAK
It’s sad to hear that Daniel Lak is relocating from Nepal. I have been an avid reader of his column in *Nepali Times* and his reporting on South Asia for the BBC. His views have been intriguing and eye-opening. His commentary on the political and social situation in Nepal shows an outsider’s perspective that has been valuable to us, and also shows how very much in touch he is with Nepal.
Abheek Jyoti, Kathmandu

TGIF
Every week I tell myself ‘Thank God, it’s Friday’, knowing that a new issue of *Nepali Times* will be available at the stands. Again, this week (#182) your excellent reporting, objective, factual, critical and positive was a pleasure reading. Your paper is an asset to Nepal, and friends of Nepal. And it’s good to know that we will not miss the comments from Daniel Lak. Although the dip in temperature these past weeks wouldn’t justify moving immediately to Miami.
Hartmut Bauder, Kathmandu
FAN MAIL
Just in case Kunda Dixit is getting put off by all the hate mail he has been getting from irate wit-challenged readers who don’t get it, I am writing on behalf of his millions of fans (ok, ok, thousands) to ask him to please continue writing his Under My Hats. We want Dixit to know that we read his paper backwards.
Sam Pradhan, email



Compassion, free service and dedication to the community are hallmarks of an ancient Himalayan medical tradition

Amchi

NARESH NEWAR in KOMANG

It's love at first sight: breathtaking Shey Phoksumdo 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 Dolpalis 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 Amchis, 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 civilisation. The most experienced Amchi of Dolpo, Karma Lhundup, who lives in Komang, traces his lineage to King Trisong Detsen of 8th century Tibet. The Amchis of



ALL PICS: NARESH NEWAR

today owe the survival of their practice to this king who invited nine of the most knowledgeable Amchis from Nepal, India, China and Mongolia to incorporate their medical knowledge in *Gyushi* text, which remains a valuable source for Amchis even today.

Mustang and Dolpa 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 undertaking suicidal.

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 certified as real doctors in remote mountain districts," says Amchi Gyatso, chairman of the Himalayan Amchi Association (HAA). Unlike

Resisting a Barbie world

Only milk should be homogenised. Nothing else

Most fashion makers and breakers, the designers, and their glassy-eyed followers assume we are all made the same. How many Barbie images of womanhood seem to have permeated our psyche even in Nepal? A nine-year-old sized me up, and asked bluntly why I don't have a Barbie-like figure. Unflinchingly, I

NEPALI PAN
Sushma Amatya



replied that I'm not one

of those plastic dolls. Wake up, girl, humans come in all sizes and shapes.

Think of the agonies of a teenager who could not overcome her genetic code to come anywhere close to her peers she admires in looks or skills. Too bad she is not genetically programmed to accept and appreciate herself as she is.

Imagine the aches inside a child's mind whose parents cannot afford the latest video game and whose friends can. Or the complexes a young man develops because he cannot speak with the same accent as his mates. As a society, we practice political exclusion and it extends to cultural exclusion by not teaching self-esteem, dignity and self-respect in our schools.

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 the 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 electromagnetic waves. These looks set the standard of beauty and success.

Let's look for non-Barbie beauty and create lifetime achievement awards for toiling mothers struggling to feed their families in the remote hills, the 'physically challenged' tailor who creates beauty by training others to sew, the waiter who never grew above two feet who makes a living entertaining children in a restaurant. Not out of pity, but for their understanding, compassion and what they can teach us. Just having faith and hope to sustain themselves and yet continuing with their lives the best they can.

Success as defined by the media today 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 laden with aggressiveness, materialism, winning at

any cost, facial features of certain textures and tints, 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, relearn the meanings behind what we do as a community and practice it, accept our differences in the world and within a nation, and learn to co-exist within our diversity. ●



renaissance

(l-r) Amchi intern Pema Bhutia tries to identify a patient's disease from his pulse. Amchi training school in Komang. Amchi Karma training students to identify medicinal plants.

modern medical courses, the Amchi system is hereditary and knowledge is passed down from one generation to another. Despite financial difficulties in the villages, Amchis take long journeys to treat the sick in their homes and spend considerable time collecting and processing plants into medicines. Senior Amchis train pre-teen apprentices into adulthood.

Amchis now want the Health Ministry to recognise their ability based not just on spiritual healing but technically proven medical skills. At present, the government concedes two branches of health studies: allopathic medicine and Ayurveda. Amchi medicine or Tibetan medicine is not integrated into health studies. "Amchis are not able to receive licenses or certificates like other health professionals even though they are the ones who actually stay in the villages and serve people for free," says Amchi Nyamgyal from Do Tarap.

Most of the time, government funds for health never reach some villages. The annual budget allocation of Rs 55,000 for Dolpo district never got there. "The number of Amchis is reducing due to financial difficulties, and people in the mountains have no one else to rely on for health care," says Amchi Tsampa Ngawang Gurung from Jomsom.

Lately, there has been an Amchi renaissance with exchange of knowledge between the Tibetan, India-based and Nepali Amchis.

The WWF and Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) in Dolpo



have worked with local Amchis here to identify, harvest and conserve medicinal plants. Amchis are now taking matters into their hands. They established the Himalayan Amchi Association in 1998 to motivate and encourage Amchis throughout the country. They also held the first Nepali Amchi conference recently to share knowledge, problems and health issues. The association organises refresher training courses every year to revive the knowledge and practice of professional Amchis. They are now working towards establishing traditional hospitals in each district and are planning to start a medical college in Kathmandu and await government approval.

Meanwhile, Amchi Karma of Komang is caught between

providing for his eight-member family and the need to provide free medical service to his community. "Compassion is the first lesson that an Amchi possesses. My people depend on me and I will continue to do this till I die," he says simply.

The 55-year-old depends on his two young nephews and a niece to propagate Amchi knowledge. Sixteen-year-old Pema Bhuti is the only female undergoing Amchi training in Dolpo. She is well-versed in *Chimagyud*, the Amchi medical text, and adept with the techniques of pulse and urine analysis. Currently studying the identification and preparation of medicine, Pema looks up to her uncle as her role model and plans to become a fully accomplished Amchi one day. ●

NGO conservation

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 putting decades of bio-diversity 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 Phoksundo National Park and Shivapuri Watershed & Wildlife Reserve—all of which are located in ecologically sensitive regions. Rara is Nepal's smallest national park and Shey Phoksundo 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 Phoksundo the highest.

While KMTNC has experience in running successful conservation programs in the country, the fact that it was handed Rara and Shey Phoksundo 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.

"But same 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 look after the parks? 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. ●

(Naresh Newar)



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NEPAL IN THE FOREIGN PRESS

Sharing water

SALMAN HAIDAR in THE STATESMAN

Statesman

Since 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. Such imaginative schemes stir both expectation as well as doubt, even alarm: upper riparians want a say in what is being planned, lower riparians fear they will lose out.

Neighbours watch carefully, none more so than Nepal, source of 70 percent of the Ganga flood season flows and hence a necessary partner in any largescale water management plans. Water sharing is inherently so complex and raises so many passions that very few schemes across international borders have ever seen the light of day. One major exception is the 1996 Indo-Nepal Treaty for joint development of the Mahakali. Implementation of this agreement is moving slowly but remains the most significant regional development of its type.

The centrepiece of the Mahakali agreement is a proposed high dam at Pancheshwar for multi-purpose development of the river, to provide both electric power and increased irrigation capacity. Nepal's main interest is in power, which it can sell to India for a good price—a look along the mountains to Bhutan shows just what regular revenue from such a source can do for a country. Thus from the start, Nepal has been very interested in the tariff for hydro-electric power and its preference has been to design the project to provide peaking power because electricity supplied at the time of maximum demand yields the highest revenue.

For the converse reason, India has held out for a base power station, one that provides regular supply through the day rather than a concentrated rush at peak periods. Perhaps India was concerned not to appear to be giving too much away, for there is no good reason why the peaking power it



Mahakali can provide a model for joint development of other Himalayan rivers

needs should not be obtained from Nepal. Earlier differences of approach on this matter may now be behind us, aided by the emergence in recent years of a market for electricity in India: where formerly there was only a state-regulated process, today the price for electric power is determined by market considerations. This healthier basis for commercial sales is in line with Nepal's long standing demand.

There is the related matter of water sharing. Here India has the greater interest, for its needs are increasing and the scope for more irrigation in India is vast, whereas Nepal's irrigation potential is constrained by its smaller size and terrain. An agreed basis for water sharing from the project requires sorting out tricky questions of 'ownership' of water, fair compensation, assured supplies to both riparians and so on.

Under the 1996 treaty, these are to be handled by a joint group of experts who are to frame a Detailed Project Report (DPR), on the basis of which work can commence. This has been delayed with a resultant loss of momentum. When not enough is happening on the main front, there is room for smaller issues to become prominent and these can retard the overall progress. However, neither side has recoiled from its treaty obligations and the project can come to life with just a bit of extra effort from both sides.

In one respect, the Mahakali scheme will not fail to attract hostile attention. Major dam projects in the Himalaya have their entrenched opponents who are concerned about environmental and safety considerations and, above all, about the human cost. When Mahakali goes through, there will be displacement of people and submergence of their land, and this will breed strong, even decisive, opposition to the entire project unless resettlement and rehabilitation are treated as no less a priority than the actual building of the dam. The record with other similar projects does not inspire confidence: displaced populations have not received their due, compensation has been inadequate and only grudgingly given. The DPR has to face this challenge if the treaty is not to collapse under the weight of local objections.

With all the difficulties attendant on such a major venture, the opportunity it provides to both nations is immense. Slow progress until now reflects reduced political commitment. Nepal has been going through a particularly bad patch and has had little time to spare for a development project of this dimension.

Meanwhile, India has set its sights on far horizons, seeing itself as an emerging global player, and in the process is becoming neglectful of opportunities nearer home. A renewed political commitment from both sides is needed to conclude all the outstanding tasks and get on with the project. Success with Mahakali can provide a model for joint development of other Himalayan rivers. Such cooperation is necessary if the vision of a vast water grid is not to remain an airy figment of someone's imagination. ●

(Salman Haidar is a former Foreign Secretary of India)

Training for train travel

Living in a country with a mere 25km of railway tracks, we have romantic notions of rails

NEITHER HERE
NOR THERE
Anagha Neelakantan

A trip South often requires that one spend considerable amounts of time and energy, and, admittedly, proportionately smaller amounts of money, on the rails. There are train routes in India that are swift, well-lit, clean and extremely commuter train-like. This is important, and not merely snobbery. 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, presumably, different if you're not getting a book contract or two out of them. Yes, the pace of train travel is wonderful in comparison with the quickie effect of airplanes, and no, you don't have to strain every sinew in your flabby legs except for the moment you board some Indian trains. I wonder how many people actually emerge cheerful and with a sparkling new insight into the organisation of Indian society or the suspension of traditionally ascribed identities in the liminal context of Train Journeys.

True, trains are an equaliser in that, once out of the oppressive and immeasurably 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 leave home, or carry home with them as a precondition to movement. The hard sleepers that are the product of the systematic felling of vast tracts of rain forests are troublesome in many ways. Even the food is strangely compelling, with the trays of greasy and overspiced generic Indian Curry. Disturbing are the many people who, having barely sat down on their third or half of the seat, begin reconstructing close reproductions of Home. The living room, with its complement of favourite slippers and shawls, the kitchen/dining room with the six-tier tiffin



box, the plate (and sometimes banana leaf which at least has the virtue of being easily disposable and biodegradable), the four serving spoons, the little glass bottles of pickles, the papad, the baby container of yogurt and, finally, the bedroom and bathroom with the furtive slipping into nightclothes under cover of dhotis, second sarees or just the upper berth. Then there are passengers who actually bathe in the toilets first 12 and then 30 hours into the trip.

I once saw a man performing an elaborate exercise with a lungi, a pair of pyjamas with a long drawstring, a kurta and a small mauve handkerchief. Naturally, it ended in disaster with the man (a filthy lecher who had it coming) tripping and falling flat on his face. But what about the rest of us who consider eating alien food, smelling many alien smells, giving ogles the evil eye, resigning ourselves to the constant rattle, drooling witlessly and groggily over our book or at the landscape and people whizzing by too fast to take close notice of and generally being a little grubby, what about those of us who consider that this is what it is about? Are we not to have our fantasy? Why must people intrude with bootless efforts to fabricate unsatisfactory replicas of evenings spent in dim light the same way all the time?

This is all especially annoying when one considers that it is invariably the people who, while making the most efforts to pretend that they are on solid ground, simultaneously exploit the relative anonymity on trains, and the suspension of 'normal life' the most. They ask the most probing and often enraging questions, things they'd think twice about without an intermediary back home. Questions about one's age, occupation, gender at times, family history going back two generations or family's first flat, whichever comes first, father's monthly income, marital status, your views on Boys, and hence your chastity, and your willingness to wed their son who has spent the last five hours coyly eyeing you from behind his General Knowledge or Norman Vincent Peale book and tried, in his mild and generally hopeless manner, to grope you on his way to the toilet.

There is a remote possibility that they are the best of all worlds, but think of buses: much more private in some ways, and conducive to complete glazing over. Or trekking, where annoying people (usually those who are consciously 'escapees') can be deflected with some brisk walking or a demented look and some gibbering about the delights of diamox. ●



Knee-jerk hair-splitting

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.

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



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

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

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 rebels post-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 People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Center for a '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: 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' since he did not reiterate his commitment to constitutional monarchy in Nepalgunj, appears lopsided. 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 Nepalgunj 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



MIN BAJRACHARYA

institutions will fall into the domain of a future parliament.

Continued cynicism and hostility or excessive hair-splitting of the Nepalgunj 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? ●



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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 Dhin (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 people welcome guests from all backgrounds, 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 hills and tarai, are one of Nepal's much celebrated features. 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 Khumbuwan in the east, and the Tharu Mukti Morcha in the west have thrown in their lots 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 Ghedung 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, and representing a range of ethnic backgrounds. 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 nationhood 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, to a system of support and identity that breaks 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 stick together regardless of creed and colour. The Pakistani and Bengali communities are already well-established here and use their nationalities as the basis for mutual support. The Nepali community is now also finding that a Nepali national identity can be a source of strength and unity here in the UK.



In Nepal it is understandable that groups wish to protect their culture and traditions from the bland, homogenising force of Western development and Kathmandu. Arbitrary attempts to forge a single national identity at the cost of minority cultures and language cause resentment, history shows that such policies are doomed to failure. Nepali national identity ultimately stems from the very diversity of culture, religion and language that is currently being dragged through the mud and blood of violent conflict as Maoists seek to divide the people, whilst the government finds itself unable to trust the basic desires and needs of its own multi-ethnic population.

Life over here in the UK is far from perfect, but the community has developed a new model of society to try and cope with the pressures, a reinterpretation of Nepali culture, which looks beyond pigeonholing and dividing Nepalis along ethnic lines. A community that looks beyond its internal ethnic divisions can find strength in its increased numbers, and celebrate the diverse array of cultures whilst sharing a common identity, a sense of nationhood in exile. During this Lhosar it was fantastic to see the ease with which people came together and celebrated regardless of their backgrounds, what they had in common was their Nepali identity. ●

ED Bowman works for Amnesty International's Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka desk.



A future foretold

Amidst the ruins of Bam, a Nepali doctor thinks of what would happen in Kathmandu

ARUNA UPRETY in BAM

That night, Farina's uncle and aunt called her from Bam. They told their niece they had heard deep rumbles from beneath the earth. Scared, they spent the whole freezing night in the car parked outside their house. Before dawn, they called another of Farina's uncles in Karman to tell him they were now going in for morning prayer.

"We got to Bam at eight in the morning," Farina recalls. "When we reached the house we saw my uncle and aunt had been crushed to death. Their prayers did not save them"

There are thousands of stories of death, suffering and also miraculous rescues from that earth-shattering event at 5:30 in the morning of 26 December last year in this historic eastern Iranian city. In 12 seconds, more than 40,000 people were killed and 120,000 injured. More than 2,000 children in Bam were orphaned.

Like Farina, most families have lost at least two relatives in the catastrophe. One elderly Iranian dressed in black tell us she lost 30 members of her clan in three villages near Bam. "Some of them were alive when they were rescued from the rubble, but died soon after. Some were unrecognisable because they were crushed by the concrete."

One mother lost her eight-year-old daughter. "She had gone to sleep with her doll the previous night. At 5:30 there was a terrible roar, the house came down, we ran out, there was dust everywhere," the mother recalls in a low voice, and then breaks into sobs: "We found her in the ruins of her room, still clutching her doll. She looked like she was still sleeping." She shows us the ragged and dusty doll, the only reminder of her daughter. "This is the last thing she touched, and she loved it so."

I arrived in Bam one month



after the tragedy as part of an international health and relief effort. As a Nepali, everywhere I looked I foresaw what will happen to us when an earthquake strikes our country. As in Iran, in Nepal we shouldn't say 'if' an earthquake strikes but 'when'. That there will be an earthquake of this magnitude in Kathmandu or other Nepali towns is a certainty. We just don't know when it will happen.

Nearly two months after the earthquake, Bam is still in utter shock. There is a four storey building in the centre of town that could easily be one of those new office blocks that are coming up in Kathmandu. My companion tells me it used to be seven stories high—but the first three floors were simply crushed like an accordion. The ruins of collapsed buildings are everywhere. Piles of bricks, dust, cement slabs, steel rods, crushed refrigerators, shoes, books lie scattered.

Here in Bam, I am constantly reminded of my grandmother's stories of the great 1934 earthquake and the one that struck eastern Nepal 15 years ago. Bam is proof of what will happen to Kathmandu when a quake of this intensity strikes our capital. Kathmandu's urban planners, architects, businessmen should be brought on a tour of Bam to see what it is like. This is what Asan, Indrachowk, the new government buildings, the fancy villas, the office blocks will look like after a quake.

They should think about rescue and rehabilitation in the aftermath of an earthquake. Those still alive will face epidemics, mental and physical agony, hunger and thirst aside from bereavement. There will

be a lack of medical facilities, no water, electricity or sanitation. We won't even know how many people died, because we don't know how many live in Kathmandu's crowded core.

In Bam, I came across a woman who appeared unwell. She was recovering from a leg injury sustained during the quake. I asked her if there was anything I could get her. She replied that she could use some feminine hygiene items and some lipstick. We both started laughing and soon her family and my translator joined in. Despite the pain, I am touched by the generosity, compassion and sense of humour among the Iranians I have met. When we travel to nearby villages to check on health needs, particularly of women, we are often asked to come into tents and share cups of tea. We hear "*Ba formain. Chai dusdari?*" so often that we start understanding the Farsi for "please come in, would you like some tea?"

We are offered dates and fruits, even from families who have nothing left. Bam is famous for its date orchards. Every family has an orchard, even if it is just a few trees. Most families live in tents among their trees. The roads survived the quake, which has helped the relief work.

Busy with my work, I help Iranian women with their problems, share their sorrow and try to make their present more bearable. But all along, my mind is faraway in Nepal. The unthinkable that could happen in my own homeland. ●

Aruna Uprety is a Nepali doctor who has worked in rural western Nepal, Afghanistan and is currently posted in Iran.



Flying solo

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

Plagued 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 corporation’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 757, still others want the airline to buy a 767 off Air Brunei.

“We have been unable to decide on the matter,” says RNAC 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 ulterior 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 Bhattarai, Chairman of National Airlines Pilots’ Association (NAPA).

One board member, Basanta Mishra, denies there are differences among the directors. “It is nothing like that, it’s just that we haven’t come to a final decision yet,” he told us. For management, that 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. During the last 12 years, when the corporation had numerous political appointees as managing directors, everyone recommended RNAC opt for lease-purchase of aircraft because it was the only way the airline could own its own equipment. The ideas were never implemented.

The government is not doing anything about the lease-purchase scheme because it has already decided to privatise the airline’s international operations. A report by International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) to value current assets and recommend a privatisation strategy is due soon. ●

(Khadga Singh)



Open and shut case

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, 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 allow foreign investment in sectors still reserved to the domestic industry. So lawyers, accountants, 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 fiefdoms that churn out products and services that can neither face foreign competition nor provide suitable alternatives. How many local ad agencies folded up after foreign companies were allowed in?

We talk about riding the global economy, but are not been able to leave tradition behind. These range from following a unique Bikram calendar, having a financial year that begins and ends in different days each year. The communication system, computer software and 24x7 working environment of the future will only support international systems. Online airline bookings to mobile banking services will not

No foreign investment please, we’re Nepali



understand Magh or Falgun. Investors in the New York Stock Exchange will not want to hear the Asad masanta results of a Nepali company listed in their bourse. The 15 minute time difference with India is just quaint, not practical.

If we agree to have passports written and signed in English (though immigration forms are in Nepali—and officers still try to match them!), why can’t we have international dates and financial years for business? The fact that we do not want to even think of embracing future trends are indicators of our attitude towards foreign investment. This is not just to attract capital, it is also to woo knowledge and technology.

There goes the Beed again, harping on his favourite peeve, you may say. But take hotels and the travel trade: 30 years ago after foreign investment and tie-ups in the hotel industry were allowed, Nepal’s hotel sector became one of the most sought after for employment. Hotel training allowed many Nepalis to go

abroad to work and compete with the best in the world. In contrast, the travel business was protected and foreign investment or tie-up disallowed.

This resulted in having good hotels, but without the knowhow for bringing tourists in droves and providing auxiliary services. The travel business has promoted ‘protectionism’ through various travel bodies that harp against entry of foreign investment or tie-ups. These associations prefer to find answers to businesses by attending junkets abroad rather than bringing in international standards of professionalism and services.

Of course, we shouldn’t make ourselves so wide that foreigners take advantage. It is an issue of a mindset required to think and debate openly without getting into emotional nationalistic tangles. If Nepali business is to progress, then gradual and regulated foreign investment is the only way. And this paradigm shift has to start from the private sector. ●

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 it seems 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 mind set 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 overall standard of banking in the kingdom two 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 in the process of 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 lineages 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 the 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 unrivaled years of experience and strong balance sheet to make that paradigm shift towards delivering unique customer satisfaction with all our products and services.



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. Nepali Times spoke to him about the retail financing wave that is sweeping the sector.



Renowned renouncers



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

THOMAS KELLY

Sadhus are an enigma 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

Right: Pashupatinath on the banks of the Bagmati on Shivaratri. Devotees queue up below the great temple waiting to enter the main Shiva temple. This temple, dedicated to Shiva as Nepal's patron deity, was built in 1696, but the site was sacred long before that. It towers above the sacred river, lined with bathing and cremation *ghats* and hundreds of smaller temples dedicated to Shiva and other Hindu gods and goddesses.

Left: Although Hindu religious texts as well as sadhus themselves hold varying opinions about drug use as a spiritual practice, it is certainly important to this sadhu. He is most likely smoking a mixture of tobacco and hashish, or *charas*, in a straight clay pipe called a *chilam*. Since the god Shiva is admired for his ability to transmute poisonous substances into harmless or beneficial elements, drug use is seen by many to be an important spiritual practice unto itself. In this way, the intoxicating properties are felt to be the blessings of Shiva. Shaivite Sadhus say that the use of marijuana or hashish has the power to take one beyond the worldly dimension and expand consciousness, magnify awareness and can cause the *kundalini* energy to awaken and descend.

Left, below: Most Shaivite Sadhus have long matted hair in imitation of Lord Shiva of the Himalaya. Local folklore says India's sacred Ganges river flows out from his long, matted hair.

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 are 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.

A sadhu's body is a map of the Hindu universe, for the body is a microcosm of the cosmos. Like a canvas, the colour and painted symbols aid in purification, inspire and remind us of the timeless divine beyond body and form. The body



ALL PICS: THOMAS KELLY

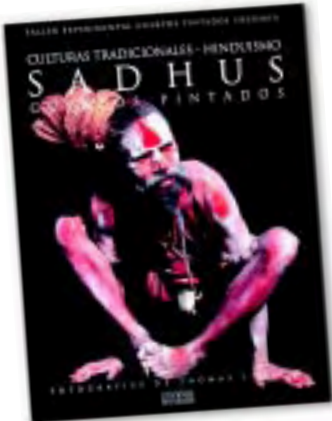


is used to tell stories. As the sadhus work toward an egoless state, they become the very symbols they have painted whether it be Shiva, Vishnu or Ram. The colors refer to esoteric inner visions and possible alchemical states of consciousness. The real goal of a sadhu is to achieve an attitude of non-attachment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

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 Galley.



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Win-win situation

Everyone wins with this award show for Nepali music

DEEPESH SHRESTHA

Whether the country has made any overall *bikas* 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 lot was literally hand-to-mouth. The situation has taken an about turn: today there are Nepali musicians and singers like Ram Krishna Dhakal and Nabin K Bhattarai 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 performance and praise in its show. The Hits FM Music Awards is widely regarded as the most representative Nepali awards: the people decide on the nominees, and an independent panel of judges—culled from the pillars of Nepali music—make the final selection.

The first Hits FM Music Awards had only

seven categories. Seven years later, there are 70 nominees for 14 diverse categories including Best Song in a Foreign Language and a Lifetime Achievement Award. Next year, they will include two more. This year, five-time winner popstar Nabin K Bhattarai has been nominated for two categories and another five-time winner, Kunti Moktan, returns yet again with a nomination for Best Female Vocal Performance. It's going to be a mother-daughter act with her two daughters, Sheetal and Shuvani, who are strong contenders for the Best New Artist award.

It's a family affair for Uday and Manila Sotang who sang "*Hamro Bajae Le*" with their young ones Shreya and Sujog. Songstress Nalina Chitrakar could pick up her second Hits FM Music Award after a six year gap, although this time she has to beat the likes of Mamta Dipbim, Poonam Singh and Sukmit Gurung and Sunita Subba for the Best Female Pop Vocal Performance.

Meanwhile, singer Karna Das had better make some more shelf space. The five-time winner has snagged three nominations this year for Best Male Vocal Performance, Song of the Year and Record of the Year. The duo GP are the odd men out with their blend of Nepali hip hop in the Best Vocal Collaboration along with more mainstream singers like Aim Baral, Sapna Shree, Uday Sotang and others. In the second year of introducing the Best Song in a Foreign Language category, former winner Dimple with his band Full Circle will vie for the award with the extremely popular rock act Robin n' Looza, and newcomers Da Nepsydaz and The Shadows.

The increase of new artists in Nepali music

is an encouraging sign. Among the opportunists out to make a quick buck, or desire their 15 minutes of fame—a feat easily accomplished thanks to Nepali music programs on television—there are those who genuinely wish to contribute to the development of Nepali music. The Best New Artist award seeks to recognise the contributions made by fresh entrants. This year Aastha stand out for their catchy beat, accents not withstanding. They'll be up against Shital and Shuvani's vocal acrobatics, Pramod Nirwan (Music Link), The Destiny and Ravi Bajracharya. Within the span of a year, last year's winner in this category, Sugam Pokharel aka 1 MB has become so popular that his name now features with established stars like Nabin K Bhattarai, Nima Rumba and Deepak Bajracharya. His distributors at music.com admit that Sugam's sales increased dramatically following his win.

Even if in small ways, the Hits FM Music Awards have contributed to improvements in the Nepali music: artists pay more attention to the quality of their recording, synthesisers are being replaced by a more human touch, singers and musicians enjoy star status and album sales are rising. Along with the respect due them, artists are increasingly being paid for their talent. Artist management has become a new sector with agencies like event-nepalaya and Real Solutions handling everything from promotions to concert bookings. Many singers have become popular on the Nepali diaspora circuit, travelling to Hong Kong, the UK, the US and Australia to perform for sold-out concerts. ●

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.

Melody king

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 over 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 *Maya* in 1990. From then on, there was no looking back. He quickly established himself as competition for (and eventually outlasted) Ranjeet 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 Bhattarai 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 this mix-and-match 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 mixed reactions. While some admire his ability to churn out tunes (he created quite a stir when he managed to record songs for three separate movies within a week), others are sceptical of the quality of music made in such a hurry.

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 Originally Recorded for a Motion Picture Soundtrack in the upcoming 7th Close-up Hits FM Music Awards. ●





Hits FM Music Awards 2060

N o m i n e e s



BEST NEW ARTIST

Aastha
Music Link
Ravi Bajracharya
Shital/Shuvani
The Destiny

BEST SONG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Hellraiserz - Da Nepsydaz
One Day at a Time - Robin n Looza:
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 Chari Ley - Arun Upatyaka
Raato Kapaal - Ram Pandey - Lochan Bhattarai
Rosi Bagarma - Hari Thapa and friends
Saali Jyu - Tulsi Parajuli
Tyo Paari Banma - Prakash Acharya

FOLK ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Banepa Bardibas - Prem Kumar Lama/ Megh Bahadur
Lama/Anju Verma and friends
Hile Bazaar - Ram Bahadur Nepal, Sarala Rai
Jhaljhal Aankhai Ma - Tulsi Parajuli
Milaun Dahine Haath - Ram Thapa
Sanka Namana - Bhirahi Karki/Sindu Malla

BEST SONG ORIGINALLY RECORDED FOR A MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK

Bagaicha Maa - Sukha Dukha - Sambhujeet Baskota
Chhit ko Saree - Aankha Lobhi Mann Paapi - Ram Thapa
Dhadkinchau - Lahana - Sachin Singh
Samjhanaley - Ziddi - Sambhujeet Baskota
Suseli Ley - Maya Namara - Suresh Adhikari



BEST PERFORMANCE BY A GROUP OR DUO WITH VOCALS

Karma Band - Hukka Mero
Mongolian Hearts - Timilai Dekhera
Mukti & Revival - Bujhai Deu
Robin n Looza: - Bhool Ma Bhulyo
The Axe - Lukna Deu

BEST POP VOCAL PERFORMANCE (FEMALE)

Mamta Dipbim - 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 Maile

BEST VOCAL COLLABORATION

Achut Dawadi / Sapna Shree - Sapani Ma Aye
GP Featuring Shya Thees - Malai Vote Deu
Uday / Manila Sotang - Timi Bina
Uday/Manila/Shreya/Suyog - Hamro Bajae Le
Yam Baral / Sapna Shree - Uddai Chau Ki

BEST FEMALE VOCAL PERFORMANCE

Devika Singh - Timilai
Kunti Moktan - Mann Ko Deuta
Manila Sotang - Bhijyo Sirani
Sapna Shree - Sagar Baru
Sharmila Bardewa - Dina Ta Deau

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 - Madhav P. Ghimire
Swayambhuka Aankha Haru - Dinesh Adhikari
Thula Thula Mahal - Karna Das

RECORD OF THE YEAR

Hukka Mero - Karma Band
Maile Choyeko - Yash Kumar
Mato Samau - Anand Karki
Pan Supari (Gym Khana) - Prakash Ojha
Thula Thula Mahal - Karna Das

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Aatmakatha - Uday / Manila Sotang
Nabin - Nabin K. Bhattarai
Purano Dunga - Karna Das
Reason - Yash Kumar
Shoonya - 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 eruptions 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 who—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 hopeless, 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 in love with love.

Marriages are contracted 'for love'. But often the kind of 'love' that leads to the altar is romantic infatuation. After the honeymoon is over, grim reality submerges the fantasy. In some cultures, marriages are created for more practical reasons. If there is to be any affection, it can come along later. But perhaps romantic love and marriage are incompatible. Projected fantasies seldom survive years of living together. Romantic love can be an

enjoyable and harmless emotional game—as long as we don't attempt to construct our lives around it.

Almost from the moment of birth, we have been surrounded by the romantic mythology. Every element of the popular culture assumes that romance is real: television, movies, novels, poetry, soap operas, advertising, popular music of every kind, newspapers and magazines. We grew up in a milieu of romantic love. Everywhere we turn, even though we seldom notice it, someone is making positive references to 'falling in love'. The reason for the uniformity of our romantic beliefs and experiences is not genetic similarity, control by the gods, or a common 'human nature'.

Good-bye illusions

That we human beings can be programmed emotionally is amply demonstrated by such diverse phenomena as nationalism, ethnic pride, loyalty to a sporting team, or attachment to a television program. But the deepest examples of emotional indoctrination come from the diverse religions of the human race. When people who fervently believe undemonstrable truths about themselves and the universe surround us, we often accept the same religious assumptions. Or we may have had a 'conversion experience', in which our feelings were suddenly transformed into a new condition. But what was the source or cause of this new emotional state? Was it not the emotional expectations we had internalised from the sub-culture that embraced that particular religion? We can be objective about religion's emotional indoctrination because only a certain segment of any population embraces a particular form of




religious faith. But the romantic mythology surrounds everyone. We have all learned the proper emotions to expect. Almost all of us try to have the romantic emotions we believe are real.


The difficulty we may have in making ourselves 'fall in love' is not our emotional deficiency but our intellectual honesty. If we eventually become convinced that romantic love is an illusion—a web of projected fantasies and artificial feelings—what do we do next? We can abandon these cultural delusions and begin to establish our relationships based on real information about each other and genuine commitment toward each

other. Reality-based relationships may not have the same emotional high, but, in the long run, they are much better for us. Instead of projecting our pre-existing fantasies on others, we can get to know them as they really are—and as the persons they are becoming. The wild, extravagant feeling of being hear-over-heels in love is certainly an enjoyable delusion while that emotional '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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Globesity

The US bites back UN plan to fight global obesity

KATHERINE STAPP in NEW YORK

A battle is brewing between the United States and the World Health Organisation (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 expert report in 1990 made similar recommendations intended to prevent diet-related chronic diseases,” wrote Kaare Norum, 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 fattest 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-wide’ coffins that can accommodate people weighing up to 318kg. But the problem is not limited to industrialised

societies. The number of obese adults has grown to 300 million people worldwide, with more than 115 million of them living in developing countries.

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 contested 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 leverage 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 drinks. 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

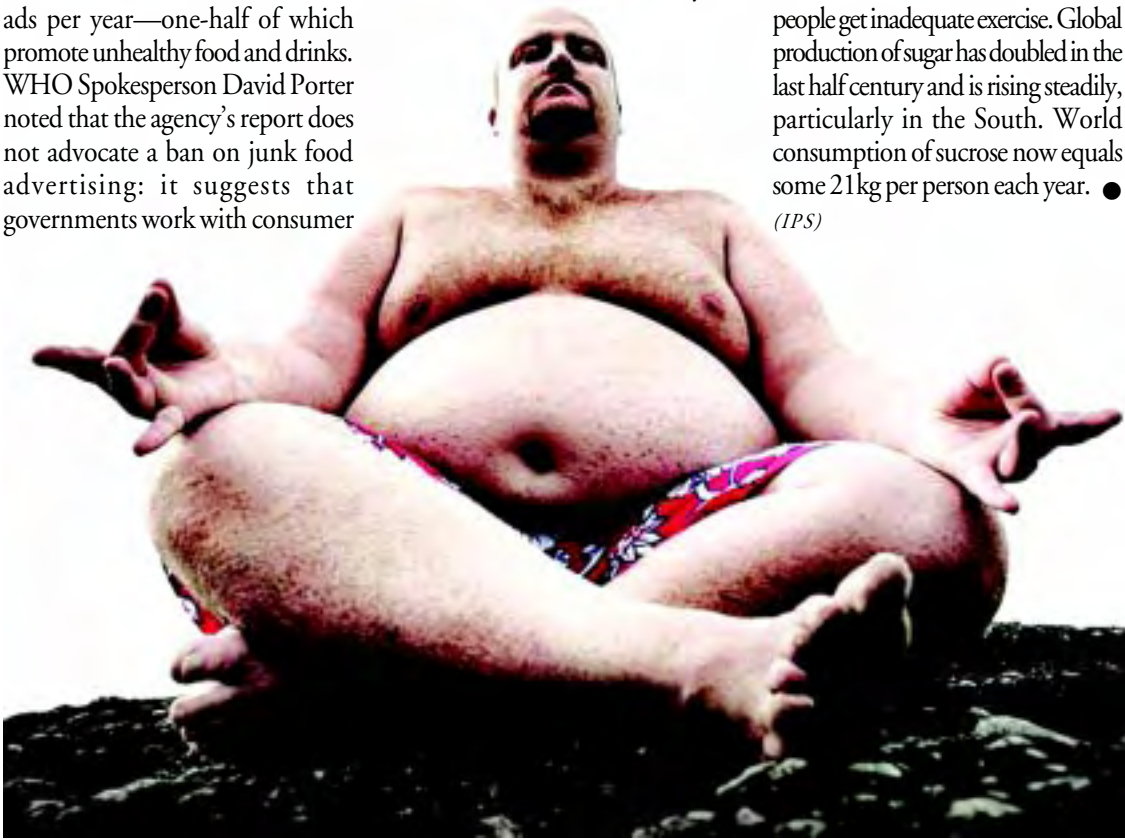
groups and industry to develop “appropriate approaches” to marketing food to children.

“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 turning 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 sucrose now equals some 21kg per person each year. ●

(IPS)



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The Pak nuke cake

The nuclear sale saga is far from over

Many 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.

COMMENTARY
MB Naqvi



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 its head.

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 pilferage 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 control 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.



As Musharraf has emphasised, security at KRL was under Khan and there was no command or control authority over him. The auditor general was bypassed. Assuming that all of this is so, governments like the United States have to cope with the closure of the case. But two other questions need to be asked. First, neither Khan nor Musharraf has so much as mentioned North Korea. Was any nuclear equipment sold to Pyongyang? If so, when? Second, how could the Pakistan Army not have known what was going on right under its nose?

It runs a tight ship—its grip on all aspects of life in Pakistan is uniformly firm. It does not rely on only one intelligence agency: it has two of its own and controls and runs several of the normal governmental apparatus. So how could the army not know about the transfer of nuclear technology? For Pakistanis, it is too serious a national lapse to worry about who gets the ultimate blame. After all, the ultimate consequences will be visited upon all the people. No one can buy the facile theory that a few individuals organised or joined an underworld, spread over four

continents, to make money out of Pakistan's perceived great achievement.

Foreigners and Pakistanis alike are sure to suspect that Khan had the active support and assistance of successive army chiefs, especially Gen Aslam Beg who led the army from 1988 to 1991 and during whose reign this grand smuggling enterprise began. As it happens, Musharraf is too precious to the US 'war on terror'. Washington has accepted the story at face value for the time being. ● (IPS)



AQ Khan displaying his gold medal awarded by Pakistani President Rafiq Tarrar in Lahore after the 1998 nuclear tests.



IT Untouchables

India's information technology industry is dominated by high castes

GAIL OMVEDT in KASEGAON, INDIA

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 a dynamic but privatised 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

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 vaunted 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



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

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. ● (Panos Features)

The absence of war is not peace

Only development protects peace once fighting stops

ANALYSIS
Mark Malloch Brown



At 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 war 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 logisticians 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 needs to find a way to provide resources for peacemaking 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 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 quickly—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 characterises the international response to post-conflict societies. More is needed than a handful of combatants reintegrated, a school or two rebuilt, and an under-funded young government lauded abroad but unable to deliver jobs or law and order to its war-scarred people at home.

Liberia and Iraq both demonstrate the need for this kind of freestanding 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 longterm stability for societies that have already suffered far too much, for their immediate neighbours, and for the world at large. ●

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

Forgotten MDGs

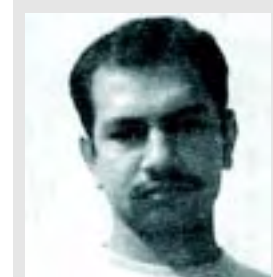
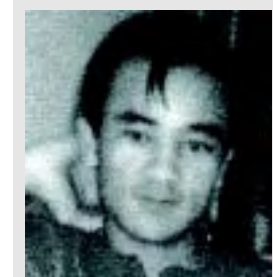
LONDON – A new study calls for more resources to provide reproductive health care in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals. 'Adding it up', a report by The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) based in the United States and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) says that gaps in sexual and reproductive health care account for nearly one-third 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 illness 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 stabilise rural areas. The last stated goal of developing a global partnership for development could bring affordable prices for drugs to treat HIV/AIDS. ● (IPS)

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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 helps repatriate us from here," the Nepali inmates said in the letter.

Four Nepalis including Harka Bahadur Pun and Hari Bahadur Gurung have died inside the cells of Piset, Byangkwan and Lard Yao 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 unhygienic 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 bedsheets. They don't even provide us tooth pastes and soaps," says the letter.

The Nepalis in Thai prisons are now asking the Nepal government to sign an extradition treaty so they can come home. Several countries including Nigeria, Australia and Estonia have signed such treaties with the Thai government and were able to repatriate their prisoners. More than 300 Nigerians were able to go home last year, but the inmates say Nepal has so far shown no interest in this matter despite constant appeals to the Royal Nepali Embassy in Thailand.

"We had discussed with Law Ministry 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 South-eastern regional affairs is working on an extradition treaty. "This problem can't be solved easily. What we really need is a new law to look into this matter," says Hira Bahadur Thapa, at the MFA. The list of Nepalis who signed the appeal:

Santu Gurung, Ras Tamang, Nuri Sherpa, Ram Bahadur Lama, Singh Bahadur Tamang, Ang Kami Lama, Sanukaji Maharjan, Phey Tshering Tamang, Raj Kumar Gurung, Ram Lal Gurung, Mangal Bahadur Gurung, Buddhi Lal Tamang, Ghaman Tamang, Ramesh Kumar Tamang, Tulo Tamang, San Bahadur Tamang, Iman Gurung, Om Bahadur Gurung, Jiwan Thapa, Puskar KC, Ram Bahadur Gurung, Rosan Gurung, Arun Kumar Tamang, Beg Bahadur Tamang, Lok Bahadur Tamang, Podhe Ghale, Chandra Kumar Rai, Nar Bahadur Pun, Prakash Tamang, Tek Bahadur Ghale, Hir Bahadur Tamang and Prakash Karki, Sita Kumari Bista, Dauki Devi, Sita Rai, Nur Maya, Bem Sherpa, Pemba Sherpa, Yangki Sherpa, Kulaki Tamang and Maya Tamang.

False

Deshantar, 8 February

The government is faking news about Maoists, says a press release by Shanker Lama alias Bhimsen, senior regional Maoist leader from the eastern region. "The government is publicising surrender of Maoist workers who were not associated with our party anymore," says Bhimsen. Former Maoist party members Parsuram Ghatani and Rosan Khadga were punished and removed from the party a long time before they surrendered to the government, says the press release. The Maoists also accuse the army of putting out news of fake encounters when cadres were brutally killed after they were arrested from their homes in Dolkha district's Babre and Chilankha villages.

Mea culpa

Sushil Koirala in

Deshantar, 8 February

In a democracy, we need basic understanding and agreement. Unfortunately, we have entangled ourselves in trifles, not in principles. Witness the Ganeshman faction, the Bhattarai faction and Giriya 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 are the forces of regression and on the other the Maoist violence. We are walking on a knife's edge. We can't help protesting regression because we have always fought for democracy. We are also bearing the brunt of the violence of radical communists.

To correct regression, we have



demanding reinstatement of parliament. Once that is done, it will form a government. That is how the constitution can come back on track. The five parties that are continuing their movement against the royal takeover have 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.

No more guns

Samacharpatra, 8 February

Dhankuta—After surrendering at the District Administration Office, ex-Maoists are now running a snooker club at the district's Dara Bazar. They say their main aim is to divert the youth from violence by making them join their club. The three ex-Maoists, Purna Chemjong, Santosh Chemjong and Lok Bahadur Chemjong were clueless about what to do next, so they started the club investing Rs 35,000 as starting capital. "We were carrying guns and living in the jungle and finally we decided to give it up," says Purna. He adds

that the three of them, working with Maoist-affiliated Kirat Workers Party, had a disagreement with the central committee leader of the Maoist Party, and were then sent to the forest for three nights without any food.

On air

Rajdhani, 10 February

For now, the Communication Ministry seems to have won over the Defence Ministry to allow new FM stations to operate. Communications Ministry secretary Mukunda Raj Poudel says the FM stations that have already been given licenses will be allowed to begin broadcasts. The Defense 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, 13 are community-based stations. President of Community Radio Broadcast Association Raghu Mainali said that the new operators will now have to make up for lost time.

Important address

Excerpt from editorial in

Spacetime, 10 February

In his Nepalganj 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 allays all suspicions and doubts. Now, the agitating parties should heed the king's call by not harbouring any more suspicions and coming together in the noble task of nation-building.

Pen: Education
Bottle: Politics

राजधानी Rajdhani, 8 February

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

Bilateral

Kantipur, 9 February

Dhulikhel – Former speaker Daman Nath Dhungana has said the current crisis in the country has turned from a trilateral conflict to a bilateral one between the king and people. He was speaking at a two-day workshop organised here by the Foundation of Parliamentary Studies and Development (FPSD) to identify the agenda for peace. “Now there is no alternative to a constituent assembly,” he said. “Students have taken to the street and the street itself will conclude the conflict if space is not provided to negotiation.” A Dhulikhel Declaration calls the monarch to maintain the dignity of the constitution.

Returnees

Deshantar, 8 February

About 50 families have returned to their villages in Lamjung after the Maoists assured them they would not be harmed. They had abandoned their homes after constant Maoist extortion, threats and intimidation. Most of the victims were party workers, teachers and their families. After the announcement, they returned home to look after their property and rejoin families who had been left behind in the villages controlled by the Maoists.

Not underground

Himal Khabarpatrika, Jan 15- 31

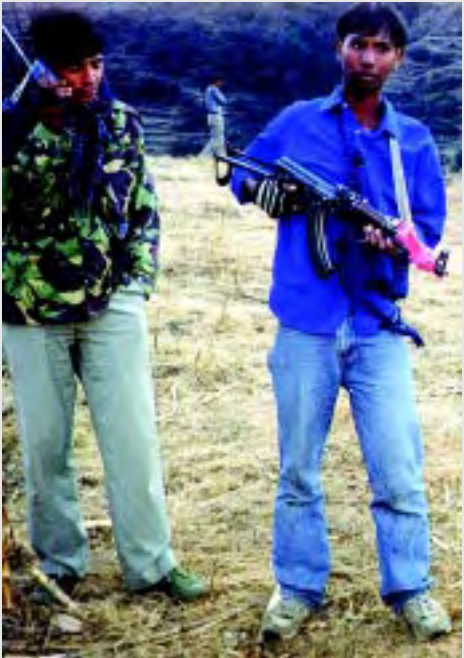
Even though the government has branded them terrorists, Maoist leaders walk around openly in the parts of midwestern Nepal they consider their base areas. This was evident during ceremonies held on 19 January to announce their Bheri-Karnali Autonomous Region in Jungthapachaur in Jajarkot. Maoist leader 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.

At the Thawang meeting: Pampha Bhusal (second from left), Krishna Bahadur Mahara (fifth), Potbahadur Bogati Diwakar (sixth) and Rabindra Shrestha (eighth).

A Maoist commander on a walkie talkie and his body guard with an AK-47.



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A 1982 photograph of BP (seated) with Nona Koirala, Shailaja Acharya and Girija Prasad Koirala.

13.12.77

I received a letter from Shailaja. I was a little depressed and moody when the letter arrived—and what a transformation it affected in my mood. I am revived, gone is the mood of depression. In her letters she reveals herself at her best, because the circumstance of letter writing impresses a restraint in her otherwise exuberant passion. What is more beautiful, graceful than the spectacle of passion controlled. There is a visible tension that makes for grace, dignity. Dignity is flat, grace is commonplace, beauty lifeless, if there is no evidence of passion in it—passion unallowed, abandoned passion, however vital or elemental is a little tornado lacking specifically the human dimension. Shailaja's letter gave me joy that a child gets in the discovery of a secret treasure. I read it many times.

14-12-77

Altho I am by nature disorganised and there is nothing like a daily routine for me, the jail does impart some kind of regularity in myself. I generally get up in the morning at about four, then after washing my mouth, I prepare tea which takes about 30 minutes. I try to read yesterday's newspaper or some poetry, according to my mood at the time, as I am waiting for the water to boil. I prepare a glass of tea for the sentry who is posted outside my room. The glass of tea, no doubt, gives

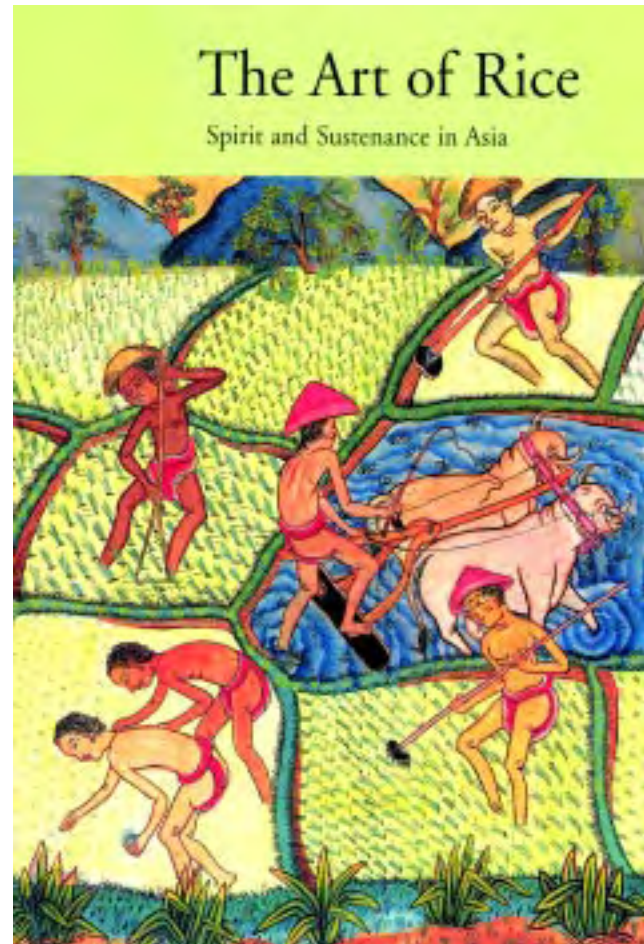
Back at Sundarijal >54 Shailaja's letter

BP Koirala is struggling against boredom, poor health and mental strain in near-solitary confinement at the Police Training Centre in Kathmandu. A letter from his niece, Shailaja, perks up his mood. He goes into a detailed description of a typical day in prison, and the writing of the diary is itself an effort to pass time and he draws it out as long as he can. The arrival of Ganesh Man Singh to prepare his own breakfast is the highlight of the mornings.

him supreme pleasure, because I prepare very good tea, and also because 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 could 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 my 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 and shipshape. 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. Niru said that the Chabahil house was also clean, tho 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



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.

"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.

The United Nations has declared 2004 the International Year of Rice in honour of a food grain that 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, symbolises life itself, as well as fertility and social continuity.

The Art of Rice: Spirit and Sustenance in Asia till 25 April 2004 at UCLA's Fowler Museum. <http://www.fmch.ucla.edu/incEngine/>

BIGBEN

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

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

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



KATHMANDU WEATHER FORECAST:
Partly cloudy, A few scattered showers



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

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



ball and add on the penalties for being in a hazard or 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 to the hole in 4 shots on a par four, then you have had a par on that hole.

A standard golf course of 18 holes could have four holes of par 3, four holes of par 5, and ten par 4'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 from the tee right into the hole.

Albatross – Finishing a hole with a score of three below par. On a par 5, it would mean getting the ball into the hole in just 2 shots. It also can be scored on a par 4 if

Golf for beginners II

you hit the ball straight from the tee into the hole. (Yes, you would also call it a hole in one). Americans like to refer to an Albatross as a "double eagle." 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

Quadruple 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 in golf is determined from an average of his score over par for a number of 18 hole 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 28. A top amateur'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

Under 14 tennis shines

The Nepal Under 14 tennis team arrived back in Kathmandu after competing in the International Tennis Federation (ITF) 14 and under Asian Championships–Zone 2–held recently in Rangoon. There were 13 other countries in Zone 2, and the Nepali players ranked sixth in combined points. The Nepal team consisted of Jimmy Sherpa, Ramesh Karki, Priti Rijal and Saloni Pandey (see pic) and was led by their coach Hem Bahadur Lama and Manager Nancy Sherpa. "All children performed well individually in singles, together in doubles," Sherpa said. The players had daily matches against other children from Bhutan, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Malaysia, Burma, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The event was organised by The Tennis Federation of Myanmar And was a certified International Tennis Federation event. The All Nepal Lawn Tennis Association endorsed the team from Nepal to participate in this important junior tennis event and said the children had established a ranking for Nepal and it will open the door for future talent to excel in Nepal's international tennis performance.



Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance



Attention Private Investors

Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance (KEVA) has been working to reduce 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.

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 20, 2004 to be included in KEVA's upcoming programs.

Contact:

Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance (KEVA)

Tel: 4467087, email: keva@winrock.org.np

Web address: <http://www.keva.org.np/>

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 2,00,000 people. Of the net revenues 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. by 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 Dealer's Association (NADA) has actively participated in the organization 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 glamour and glitz of vehicles the hardcore 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:

AIT Pvt. Ltd. (TVS)
Annapurna Associates Pvt. Ltd.
Annapurna Trade Center
Anupam-Industries/Concept Ent. India Pvt. Ltd.
Arun Intercontinental Traders
Avco International Pvt. Ltd.
Bhajaratna Engg. & Sales Ltd.
Bhikshu Auto Parts
Bhudeo Trading
Brakes India Ltd.
Bright Orient Int'l (P) Ltd.
China Motors Pvt. Ltd.
Continental Trading Ent. Pvt. Ltd.
Cube Intercontinental Pvt. Ltd.
Dugar Brothers & Sons
Engine Treatment Pvt. Ltd.
Euro Gears Pvt. Ltd.
Fujima Oil Company Pvt. Ltd.
Gabriel Shox
Gorakhkali Rubber Udyog Ltd.
Hansraj Hulaschand & Co. P. Ltd.
Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd.
Hitco Pvt. Ltd.
Hulas Motors Pvt. Ltd.
Mahavir Trade Centre
Maruti Auto Deco
Mohan Helmets Pvt. Ltd.

Morang Auto Works
Nabil Bank Ltd.
National Motors
Nemlink Int'l Traders Pvt. Ltd.
Nepal Overseas Trading Concern
Padma Shree Pvt. Ltd.
Pitstop Moto Accessories Traders
Premier Insurance Ltd.

Purolator India
RabRen International
Radio City Car Audio
Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd.
Royal Trading Incorporated
Shrestha Int'l Trading Concern
Sipradi Trading Pvt. Ltd.
Soorya Auto Mechanical Works P. Ltd.
Standard Chartered Bank Ltd.
Star International Ltd.

Sundram Fasteners Limited
Super Circle Auto Limited
Surya Distributors Pvt. Ltd.
Syakar Co. Ltd.
The Ganesh 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.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ More than 70 exhibitors
- ◆ Participation on all Leading Brands
- ◆ Launching of New Models
- ◆ Seminars/Talk Programs
- ◆ Classic Cars on Display
- ◆ Food Festival

and many more....

Feb. 18th: Open for Business Visitors & Invitee only

3rd NADA Auto Show 2004

Feb. 18 - 22, 2004
BICC, KATHMANDU



TIME: Business Hrs: 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Public Hrs: 1:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
(Entry closes at 6:00 p.m.)

"Late ko deah ma quando tenderi." (In a land of fools, a man with a goatee is a hero.)

LA

KTM

happy vday fans! from jessy

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Love is grand; divorce is a hundred grand.
--Unknown American

Next Change: Herojig contemplates love, sex, and marriage, but gets stuck on sex for the rest of the day.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Reflection and Reality** Paintings by Erina Tamrakar 14-28 February at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Bungadeo Jatra** Paintings by Sharada Chitrakar till 15 February at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahel Revisited, 4218048
- ❖ **Sadhus: The Great Renouncers** Photographs by Thomas Kelly from 13-29 February at Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
- ❖ **Farewell Photo Exhibition** Karl and Antoinette Schuler at Patan Museum Exhibition Gallery till 16 February.
- ❖ **For the sake of love** Sculpture, painting and print exhibition till 2 March at Gallery Moksh, inside Club Hardic, Jhamsikhel. 5528703

EVENTS

- ❖ **Introduction to Foot Relflexology** 6-7.30 AM on 16 February. Above Everest Bookstore at Babar Mahal Revisited. Details: Buddha's Feet, 4425931
- ❖ **Valentine Salsa with Diego** 8.30 PM onwards at Roadhouse Café, Thamel. Entry: Rs 300
- ❖ **Open House** at the American Language Centre from 11AM-2PM on 14 February. Open to all.
- ❖ **Qualities of Buddha Body, Speech and Mind** Teaching by Druptop Rinpoche 2PM on 14 February at HBMC Gompa.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** with Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band every Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's every Friday from 7PM onwards. 4479488

FOOD

- ❖ **Cupid's Spell by the Pond** Dinner, a bottle of wine (for couples) and dance through a silver themed 14 February at 1905, Kantipath. Couples: Rs 1,200. Singles: Rs 700. 4225272
- ❖ **Valentine's day at The Chimney** Four course dinner for two for Rs 2,000 (glass of wine inclusive). Hotel Yak and Yeti, Kathmandu. 4248999
- ❖ **Love at the Jazz Bar** Wine and five course menu on 14 February. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **Valentine's Day** Romantic lunch or dinner at The Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Valentine's Day Special** candlelit evening on 14 February at Dwarika's Hotel. Rs 2,999 per couple. 4479488

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500
- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage** Dadagaon luxury package of gourmet meals, board and transport. Highland Travel & Tours, 4253352, 4253053
- ❖ **Thank Goodness It's Friday** Dwarika's overnight package for local residents. 4479488

BOOKWORM

Bad Elements: 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 superpower through the eyes of its dissidents.

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

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

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

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| | |
|-----------|------------|
| Good | < 60 |
| Ok | 61 to 120 |
| Unhealthy | 121 to 350 |
| Harmful | 351 to 425 |
| Hazardous | >425 |

| Location | 1 FEB | 2 FEB |
|-------------|-------|-------|
| Putalisadak | 365 | 188 |
| Matsyagaun | 40 | 45 |
| TU | 156 | 90 |
| Bhaktapur | 202 | 160 |
| Patan H | 290 | 187 |
| Thamel | 234 | 151 |

NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-12-02-2004 03:00 GMT

by MAUSAM BEED

The entire subcontinent is bathed in sunlight in this satellite picture taken early on Thursday morning, even though there is lingering fog over the western Ganga plains and hazy mist over the rest. The temperature is climbing steadily in the tarai, but in Kathmandu Valley the effect will be tempered by the filtering action of the haze. There are no sizeable westerly fronts on the horizon, but the season for them is not over yet. Mainly sunny and partly cloudy with chilly, misty mornings in Kathmandu Valley.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri
21-03

Sat
20-02

Sun
21-04

Mon
21-03

Tue
21-03

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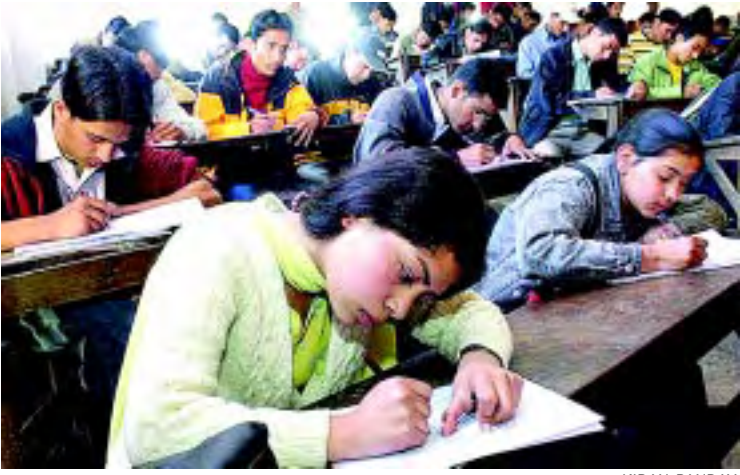
102.4
रेडियो सगरमाथा



ROYAL ADDRESS: King Gyanendra delivering his address at a civic felicitation ceremony in Nepalganj 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, *Shanti*, 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.

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KIRAN PANDAY

The essence of chicken

Of all 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 civilisation 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 danfe, 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* that goes:

*Rato bhale kwae kwae...
Sutkeriko nama gari
Tauko maile khaye
Hey, hoina maile dhanteko
Satte satte dharo dharma
Jhuto kuro chhaina boleko!*

Now, we all know most Nepali folk songs are made for dancing, not translating. But this one has to be turned into English to give us a flavour of the high status that we have traditionally accorded chickens in Nepal's socio-cultural milieu. In fact, if most of our intersections didn't already have statues of various national heroes adorning them, it would be fitting that a bust in honour of the unknown hen be put up urgently

at the Chabahil Roundabout. All together now (sung to the tune of *Rato bhale*):

Red rooster,
Cock-a-doodle-doo to you, too!
I fed you to the mother of a newborn babe
But I ate your head,
I swear. (And I'm not making this up!)

Some of you more alert readers will have noticed that chickens have been in the news 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 of national and international importance that are now coming home to roost.

Hungry for news, the gathered journo's badgered the fowl leadership with tough questions which they fielded with equanimity, poise, aplomb and, yes, even guano, from the podium. We have just retrieved a transcript of the Q&A session of the press meet and, in the interest of transparency and the public's right to know, we present below a short excerpt after carefully deleting expletives, anti-monarchist slogans and bird droppings:

Rishi Dhamala: Welcome everybody to this session of the Reporter's Pub. We are glad to have with us today a delegation of the All-Nepal Federation of Flules

Feathered Friends to assure us that they are in the pink of health, and we can safely eat them without dropping dead in the process. As proof, our panel of speakers today have kindly agreed to have their heads chopped off and be grilled by members of the press corps. OK, who wants to go first:

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.

FT: 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 authoritarians is not to underestimate our potential to create havoc and not to make the mistake of counting us before we hatch.

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

NEPALI SOCIETY

Half the sky

She dreamed of being a doctor but Madhuri Karki's career took a little detour. 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 used to ups and downs. In Telkot, where locals collected firewood and the army conducted exercises, she was blamed for everything that went wrong. Madhuri realised the solution lay with devolution, 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.

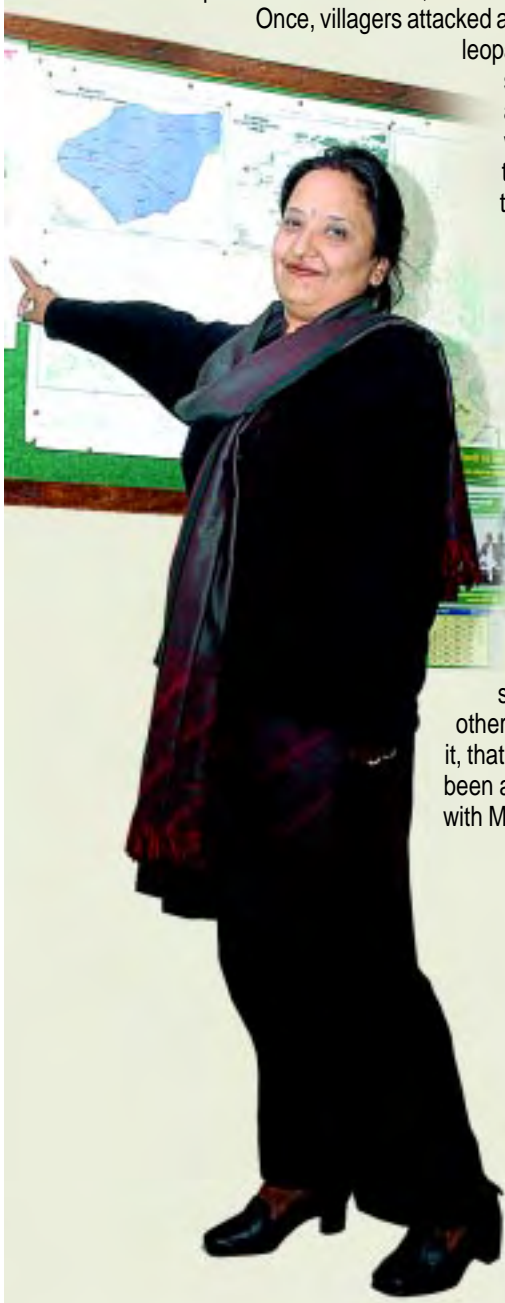
Once, villagers attacked a marauding

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. ●

(Khadga Singh)



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