Cute cars
The 3rd NADA Auto Show 2004 is underway at the BICC 31 Sunday. Among the sleek cars on exhibit are all the latest model sedans and SUVs. But three cute cars need special mention: Nepal’s very own Sherpa light commercial vehicles, India’s road queen the Ambassador, and the tried and trusted rear-engined Volkswagen Beetle. The Sherpa is made by Hulas Motors in Biratnagar and has launched Nepal into the list of countries with its own automobile industry. Cube International is importing the newest model Ambassador to Nepal and promoting them as ideal taxis. The Great-Himalayan VW Beetle Rally kicks off on 13 March, with money raised going to cliff palate surgery. Read all about these great cars on p 12-13.

KHADGA SINGH
The Maoists are still able to set off big bangs in the capital, and assassinate people they don’t like, but times are getting tougher for the rebels. The Maoists faced an unprecedented barrage of criticism from Nepali and international human rights organizations and political parties for the murder of peace activist Ganesh Chhalwal on Sunday. The leadership appears to be taken aback by the extent and tone of condemnation and the rebels are in damage control mode.

After the morale-hitting extradition of two top leaders from India earlier this month, the Maoists appear to be reassessing their strategy. Student leaders have called off a five-day bandh scheduled for next week, saying they empathise with the people’s hardships.

However, this week, several district level cadres from the UML, Nepali Congress and RPP have been gunned down in various parts of the country. The Maoists had pledged that they wouldn’t target political parties and this has cast doubts on their credibility. The latest killings are bound to further widen the gap between the parties and the Maoists.

Meanwhile, civilian casualties caused by Maoist booby traps are on the rise. Even if these attacks were not deliberate, the end result is that at least ten civilians have been killed this week alone by carelessly laid Maoist roadside bombs, grenades and socked devices in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Surkhet.

There have also been civilian casualties at the hands of the army: in the latest incidents, soldiers gunned down three young men collecting roadside donations on Shivapuri in Chitwan.

The Maoist campaign of sabotage and assassinations in the capital come as Prince Gyennendra himself continues his whirlwind tour of the Maoist heartland. In what is obviously the palace’s new public relations drive, television news have been showing the people spontaneously greeting the monarch in areas the Maoists regard as their demes.

In an interview with the BBC Nepali Service from somewhere in India, Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara this week took a softer line than usual, but insisted that the republic demand was still on: “We are prepared to accept a democratic and multi-party republic.”

The Maoist attacks in the Valley have been carried out by a brand new ‘Valley Team’ headed by senior guerrilla leader Top Bahadur Rayamajhi. The previous rebel cells were decimated by army intelligence late last year in an operation that also yielded a large quantity of weapons and explosives. The Maoists blamed captured cadre who gave away information on hideouts, safe houses and secret arms caches in the capital.

The five-party alliance, still smarting from the king’s Islamist rebukes against them in the Nepalajag address, used Democracy Day on Thursday to relaunch their agitation, announcing a new phase of protests to force the king to restore parliament. Party demonstrators at Rana Park on Wednesday were instructed to keep their anti-monarchy slogans mild and not to provoke violence. However, some students immediately began chanting pro-republic slogans and demanded a more radical line.
**What’s the point?**

With each passing day in this terrible conflict, one wonders if the two sides are competing to see who can punish the people more. The Maoists bist a bus in Sundulpulchre. Nine passengers are killed, the heads of a 14-year-old boy are bound 100 times. Children are killed by roadside bombs on their way to school. The Maoist website “takes credit” for the murder of Ganesh Chitrak. Take credit for killing the innocent and you have committed to violence, a victim of violence himself—just because he disagrees with your methods?

Security forces surround a house in Makwanpur on a tip-off and apparently arrest everyone inside. And on last nights, the last Nepali, full-scale conventional warfare in progress in Madhuban with air support and artillery, the rest of the army was on TukTuk simulating helicopter-borne assault. The foot soldiers are not in the front, the old guards who were the prisoners, the old prisoners on the fence supposed to kill them.

If the political parties ever trusted the Maoists’ pledge not to target their workers, after this week’s murders they won’t do so again.

We are now in the same notorious league as Guatemala or Colombia for human rights. If the military and the guerrillas can’t stop fighting, they can at least pledge to fight by the rules. Signing the human rights accords would mean ensuring that innocent Nepalese don’t get any more unneeded, superfluous, unnecessary and wanton violence. All this has achieved in eight years is militarise the country and spread more and more violence, the army tripled its budget in three years. It’s time for the comrades and the generals to ask themselves: what is the point?

**Colombia and Nepal: Countries once famous for coffee and mountains**

**Guest Column**

Karim Echekrak

The errors made and the mistakes committed by Nepal’s war bear many resemblances to the early part of the conflict in my own country, Colombia. Nepal used to be known for its great export of coffee, the world’s best coffee. And that image is changing. Colombia used to be known for coffee, today it is known for the world record it holds for gross violations of human rights.

There are 20 violent deaths per day in Nepal. Nepal is getting the toll in Nepal is coming up to that level. There are more than two million displaced people in Colombia, Nepal is getting there. Colombia is proof of how badly things can go wrong in a country. Equally important: it shows how badly things can go wrong in any country where root causes of land ownership, inequality, injustice, corruption, impunity and poverty are not addressed.

Some 500 Colombian landowners occupy 45 percent of the country’s cultivable land. More than half the Colombians live below the poverty line, 80 percent in rural areas. The annual income of the wealthiest 10 percent of Colombians is 62 times that of the poorest 10 percent. Although the economy has done well, it is inequality more than poverty that is a cause of the violence. Colombia’s conflict dates back to the late 1940s, when FARC (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia) first emerged from a group of peasants fighting for land reform. During the 1960s more guerrilla groups came up. The upper classes were alarmed and so was the United States.

The government first tried violent eradication during the mid-1960s, by allowing the military to arm civilians, which is what the Nepalese government is now doing. Successive presidents ruled under a state of emergency for over two decades, giving the military more power and curtailing civil liberties. The military budget swelled and so did foreign aid financial, training and hardware for the armed forces. Freedom of press was restricted, students and union leaders were arrested and there were widespread human rights violations throughout the 1970s and 80s.

The deteriorating economy opened the door for the narcotics trade, making the guerrillas and drug lords initial allies. But as they grew richer and more powerful, the drug lords began to hate the guerrillas as the oligarchs. The cash-starved guerrillas started extortion and kidnapping of landowners and their relatives. In order to defend themselves, the landowners formed paramilitary groups, which grew into a brutal force during the 1980s involved in ‘social cleansing’; the elimination of real or suspected drug addicts, ex-converts, thieves, criminals, prostitutes, homosexuals, beggars and street children. A civil society that shared these interests tolerated the rebels.

By the 1990s, the spiral of violence had gone out of control—leading to a culture of violence in society. Moral values declined, media turned to sensationalism and bias, and aggression and intolerance became common. Today, 85 percent of violent deaths in Colombia are

**Letters**

**Big Gulp**

I flew from Kathmandu to Abu Dhabi last Saturday night in a much better position than most of my fellow passengers. How many of those migrants to the Gulf countries for work lose their dignity before ever leaving Kathmandu? No, nobody tells me that in some donor office, there is a budget line for a Citizen’s Advice Bureau, money for an institution that provides free legal information to wanna be migrant workers, an office that investigates the credibility of manpower agencies, checks the fees being charged, the services being offered, the contracts being signed and assists those who feel they have been mistreated or cheated. Tell me, that in some annual report there is a budget line big enough to provide fair salaries for a team of well trained, committed staff who have the skills to answer the last minute concerns or anxieties of migrating workers with respect and seriousness—instead of treating labour migrants like a herd of stupid school boys, country bumpkins or prospective terrorists. By creating a new rank of officials at Kathmandu airport do. It is not necessary for further proliferation into support services for those who migrate overseas for work. It is not necessary for the production of more overvalued consulted baseline studies, or yawn-yawn mandate heavy, tactfully diplomatic, policy positioning. Please, tell me that there is some remnant, original, socially responsive and socially responsible intervention to support Nepalis workers travelling overseas for work is taking place right now.

Jamie Cross, University of Sussex, UK

8, Going on 9

I read with interest and sadness Kunda Dixit’s ‘9, going on ’11’ (#113). It seems like a distant memory sitting down for breakfast (in some annual report there was mention that in 1996 in Kathmandu to read a news item that the Maoists had started a ‘People’s War’. We expected it would soon be resolved, and the Maoists would rejion the electoral process and Nepal could get back to building their young and fragile democracy. Who could have foreseen the next few years: the royal massacre, the intensification of violence, the dismantling of the institutions of democracy. Little did we know that the US would pump in so much military aid. Dixit writes: “As the Maoist created eight years ago, there is no government and it is remote.” If there is ever to be peace, the ‘war’ must be seen as not just a ‘Maoist war’ but also a ‘power war’. Both sides have shown the Nepalese people and the world that they are willing to fight to the last man. It is a lose-lose situation. Only when they start negotiating a real and lasting peace will Nepal’s future look bright. Let’s hope next year this time you won’t have a headline ‘9, going on 11’.

Michael van de Veer, Hawai

**Mediocrity**

I used to admire and respect Daman Nath Dhungana as a politician with dignity and principles. His tenure as Speaker demonstrated that he could have grown into a statesman. But lately, I have been disappointed with his political analysis. He is exemplified by his stance in the piece you translated (‘Bilateral’ #18). His role as the commentator of the failed peace talks was pathetic, and today he just sounds tried, frustrated, disillusioned and a person who has lost touch with the ground reality. Or has he decided to take any extreme measures to punish “mediocre politicians” and an “active palace”.

Sandesh Hamal, Lalitpur

**Media**

It was stimulating to read the discussion in your paper about the ongoing media war in Nepal. It seems all your contributors in #182 were open to the option of foreign media in Nepal. It is true that there has been a phenomenal growth in the private media in Nepal. But has it really benefited our society? There has been a lack of serious discussion about grave topics like education policy and corruption. Private media is doing more now is covering superficial and sensational topics that make readers happy. If we take the notion that people make up their minds after reading the papers, then what is the result? They have become hopeless and cynical about the future. If we base the political parties, the king and the Maoists for the current state of the country, should media also take responsibility? On top of this, what private media is doing right now is fighting with each other for money and market share when the country is in such a grave situation.

We should look at media (swadshed or bishesh), which has tremendous social service role. They are not here just to make money and construct big and big. Brajesh Gautam, Kathmandu

**Sinkik**

Your editorial ‘Seek em’, #180 was quite fascinating in its context, but you are right that Nepal is not so small that it can just be swallowed up like Sikik. So, why the loss of Sinikism? It must be not be so unprejudiced on that issue, but let’s probe whether India can create other problems for us which would hinder or restrict us to development and prosperity. The problem isn’t that Nepal lacks self esteem, as you argue, but they are sensitive and patriotic. We don’t have an inferior complex. We are not too far from our identity. We also lack zest and zeal, and to a certain extent we lack morality. So let’s incuculate these values so that we never have to worry about Sikikisation because of the strength of our national unity. At least the danger is pride is intact and these will protect our national identity.

Kailasha Poudyal, Bhaktapur

**The king and you**

‘Ok Lai’s a king can’t do wrong’ (#181) raised interesting points about the responsibilities of a king towards his ‘subjects’. Despite the ‘we’ and ‘we’ that, he couldn’t
due to common crime and not directly to the armed conflict. When the violence increasingly touched the elite (politicians, notable figures, and the media) the government tried to rein in the para-militaries, declaring them illegal.

But bringing them to justice has proved almost impossible: their power to intimidate and their financial or military links were too strong against a feeble system of justice. The guerrillas turned to the same brutal methods that characterised their enemy and worked against the common people for whom they were supposed to be fighting. From around 6,000 guerrillas in early 1990s, FARC is now up to 20,000 and controls 40 percent of the territory. They grow because the young have few jobs and opportunities.

Undeterred from their goals by foreign governments, the fight against the drug mafia has intensified, fueling more violence. The cartels have splintered into smaller groups that are even more difficult to detect. No amount of aerial herbicide spraying, no crop alternatives have effectively controlled the lucrative trade. Strangely, the capital Bogotá, has lowered its crime rate in the last years, standing out as the only city in Latin America to do so. The reason: two successive mayors who were honest, committed and accountable.

Karin Eschelhurst is a Colombian who has been living in Nepal for the past five years.

**DHAKA**—There have been three haralds in five days in Dhaka, so as a Nepali I am prepared.

It is the harsh season, and when that happens you know the two dowager hares of Bangladeshi democracy are at each other’s throats again. The difference this time is that Khaleeda Zia is the premier, and it is Sheikh Hasina’s turn to bring the country to a standstill in an effort to unseat her rival. Earlier, Begum Zia had done the same when she was in the opposition.

Our political cultures are the same. They have harralds, we have bandas. The relationship between Zia’s BNP and Hasina’s Awami League resembles the tie between Nepal Congress and the UML, in the good old days, even though in Kathmandu, political mudlinging has now been replaced by gunfire and bombs.

Given that they had a headstart over us, the Bengal have developed into a fine art form. Compared to our bandas, their strikes here are civilised. For instance, a Bangladeshi harrald is enforced only between dawn and dusk. How convenient. Why didn’t we think of that before? This means milk trucks and bread delivery vans do their rounds in the morning unhindered, shopping malls do roaring business in the evening.

During haralds, Dhaka’s one million rich-khal-pukurs like their Thamel counterparts, earn enough to pay back their loans. Haralds have now become an important component of the political economy of Bangladesh with its wealth redistribution potential.

The other thing Nepal shares with our Bangladeshi cousins is our penchant for the most convoluted conspiracy theory to explain the simplest political phenomenon. Even professors mutter something big is about because the opposition parties are agitating at a time when so many foreigners are here. The fact that there is a global Microcredit Summit going on in Garmentland that has attracted foreign dignitaries is too obvious an explanation to convince them. It reminded us of Chandrashekar’s private visits to Kathmandu last month billed as a harbinger of political change in Nepal.

There is a riot brewing in the heart of every South Asian that leaps out the moment it spots a weaker target. Perhaps that explains the impatient and insular politics of our leaders. From Sheikh Hasina to General Musharraf and from President Chandrika to our very own Corona Prachanda—all are convinced there is only one way to govern and only they know what it is. Like Nepalis, Bangladeshis take their independence very seriously and the mantra here too is the ESL—unity, sovereignty and independence.

Spring is the time when memories of a long struggle come flooding back. It is springtime for people in Dhaka and Kathmandu as a budding democracy tries to blossom anew.

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> **OP-ED**

**A Dhaka spring!**

A springtime of political awakening in Bangladesh

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**Correction**

Due to a currency conversion error, the price of two Indian Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) was erroneously stated in $, going on $ #183. The aircraft will cost approximately Nrs 500 million apiace.
Back to zero

NARESH NEWAR

A s expected, it took just four days for the government to buckle under the pressure of petroleum dealers who closed down all 1,450 gas stations across the country this week.

The government had decided to stop allowing gas stations to sell kerosene, saying it was too tempting for them not to mislabel it as diesel and petrol. It told gas stations to keep their kerosene depots outside a 1 km radius from their gas stations. On Wednesday, the government agreed to give the gas dealers six months to comply with the regulation.

The gas dealers have bought time, and they only got a slap on the wrist for threatening public health by the widespread adulteration of fuel. One spot check by this paper two years ago revealed that up to 45-50 percent of the diesel and petrol in Kathmandu’s gas stations were mixed with kerosene.

Overwhelming public opposition to the strike and lobbying by the consumers’ associations were not enough to bolster the government’s capacity to resist the dealers. However, the government says it will use the six months to conduct a probe on gas stations selling adulterated petrol.

“Now it’s all up to the consumers, they have to be empowered,” says Sri Krishna Shrestha, president of Pro-Public, an organisation campaigning actively against adulteration. Many fuel the petroleum mafia is so strong, its tentacles go so high up in the Nepal Oil Corporation and the bureaucracy, that the government can’t really challenge it.

But an official from the Department of Commerce put up a brave face, telling us: “We are firm in implementing our decision and the government will take severe measures to reduce adulteration in the future.”

The government had reportedly decided that, had the strike continued, it would have either forced the gas stations to open or got the Nepal Oil Corporation to scrap their dealership licenses. When the petrol strike started earlier this week, people thought this was again about prices. It wasn’t. Essentially, it was about one party that wanted to keep on adulterating fuel and pocketing the profit.

The government decided to implement a task force recommendation to relocate kerosene pumps far from the petrol stations. It’s not that the mixture of kerosene in petrol takes place right in the petrol station, but the hope was that the problem would reduce to some extent. Actually, adulteration starts from the storage point in Anakligunj depot and there is a large network involved in this crime (Nepal Times #19, ‘Nepal Oil Corruption’).

The mood on the street was turning ugly against the gas dealers. “The government finally acted, we support it, this crime has to stop,” said Ramesh Thapa, who had queued up two hours in Pulchok. “They can’t bully the government and harass the people anymore. They should be punished!” shouted a visibly upset Sita Lama on a mop who was late for work because she had already waited an hour for gas.

These voices were magnified in public discussions on FM stations like Sagarmatha where the gas dealers and the government came under a sustained barrage of criticism for being unable to stop adulteration. Their message was: don’t let the petrol mafia get away with this time.

There has been evidence that almost 60 percent of the petrol stations across the country are selling adulterated petrol and this has been going on for years. Following an investigative report by this publication and Himal Khurantarki in 2000, the government set up a probe committee under Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies. Only a handful of gas stations who openly admitted adulteration were over penalised.

Now, the gas stations have bought time. The government will be involved in the same kind of study conducted five months ago by the probe committee which revealed that 90 percent of gas stations were selling adulterated fuel. For another six months, the Nepali public will be using diluted diesel and petrol and breathing in carcinogenic fumes.

Kerosene in petrol and diesel does not burn completely and releases cancer causing hydrocarbons in the bleed and carbon monoxide instead of the less harmful carbon dioxide. Besides destroying engines, it also harms humans. Kerosene destroys the catalytic converter, allowing benzene additives in the petrol to escape into the atmosphere. Benzene is a known cancer-causing gas.

Asma is on the rise in Kathmandu, caused mainly by the soot particulates in the air from vehicle exhausts burning adulterated fuels. Another health problem is hypoxia, which is caused by lack of oxygen in the air. The bleed and carbon monoxide in the air, again caused by incomplete combustion. Hypoxia leads to fatigue and dizziness and is the cause of numerous traffic accidents.

Vehicle industries are increasing at 13 percent a year, and most vehicles are poorly maintained and use low quality fuel. The more the government delays taking extreme measures to reduce adulteration, the more public health is at risk. Children suffer the most from respiratory problems. A World Bank study in 1995 showed Kathmandu’s air pollution even then caused almost 5,000 cases of bronchitis in children and 20,000 cases of asthma per year.

Gas stations have won the right to keep selling adulterated petrol and diesel for another six months.

No Nepal

Out there, no one knows the extent of this country’s agony

**H** alway around the world from Nepal, I’ve covered a lot of territory in the past week. On board passenger jets, in airports, bars and restaurants and in conversations with dozens of people. I’m struck by one thing. Nobody anywhere knows the extent of Nepal’s agony.

In Delhi, the buzz is all about elections. How bad will the Congress party muddle be? Will they finally ditch Sonia Gandhi? How big will Vajpayee’s win be and what will that mean for a slew of domestic issues from taxes to Hindu temples in Ayodhya?

Not a mention of Nepal anywhere, not even with extradition of Maoists and pro rebel rallies organised in Delhi. This is particularly worrying, given that most analysts in Nepal seem to think that India’s role in resolving the Maoist issue is crucial. It may be, but at the moment, India is busy, very busy. Nepal is doing little to engage India on this, merely reacting to issues and occasionally allowing misguided or malevolent local press barons to whip up anti-Delhi hysteria.

Make no mistake. People in India are concerned for Nepal. They ask after its welfare, still shake their heads about the royal massacre and compare the Maoists with their own loopy Left in Bihar. But their concern is momentary and lapses when the talk moves onto local politics, peace with Pakistan, Musharraf’s possible role in selling takeovers to the North Koreans and most importantly—cricket, the upcoming test tour of Pakistan.

Nepal rates far below all of these items on the Indian radar screen. A few days in London followed my time in India. In the heart of the beat that is the BBC, I again fielded questions about Nepal.

Well informed people—and there are many there—wondered which was in greater trouble: the Maoist insurgency or constitutional monarchy? My answers were long and a trifle complex. I could see even my most interested friends glazing over a little. They picked up a little when I told them that their tax money was being lavishly spent on various reports and media seminars by the dear old Department for International Development, DfID. And not much development. They all giggled at the thought of a recent protest for dozens of Nepali politicians to Northern Ireland, which a lot of DfID conflict resolution types seem to think is a resolved conflict. “At least they could up some proper Guiness,” remarked one friend who’d been there and tasted what passes for the famous black stout in Kathmandu.

But no notion of Nepal’s dire challenges, of the sad demise of democracy, of the violence, the economic decline and the sheer absence of creativity at any level of the current leadership, or the rebellion’s top cadres. Nothing. Finally, I sat now at sea level in America and listened to the world’s slowest media casualty, Iraq, Bush, Kerry, desertion, Vietnam, taxes, deficits, evil, terrorism and on and on. No Nepal. Perhaps it’s for the best, maybe this place needs to be left alone to face it’s fate. But it’s all rather sad.
DOMESTIC BRIEFS

No to civilian militia

The Brussels-based conflict resolution organisation, International Crisis Group (ICG), has said the government’s plans to set up village militia risks escalating the conflict.

The government has denied it has already started distributing weapons to volunteer ‘peace committees’, but says such a force will allow locals to resist the Maoists and deter violence. Not so, says the ICG, which argues that militia are likely to become “an untrained, unaccountable and undisciplined armed group”.

Human-rights groups have argued that the civil militia will make villagers a party to the conflict by destroying their neutrality. ICG says experience from other countries show that it will lead to a rise in human rights violations. As a way of things to come, the group gives the example of the village of Sudama where locals have been armed. On 4 February, the village was attacked by a large number of Maoists. Although the attack was repelled without any reported injuries to civilians, it appears that the village was targeted because of its reputation as a pilot location for the militia program.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International condemned the murder in Kathmandu this week of Ganesh Chhular, head of the Maoist Victims’ Association (MVA). “Such killings of civilians are in contravention of international humanitarian law, which promotes respect for civilians and prohibits reprisals and summary executions of those not actively engaged in the conflict,” the group said.

Political parties and the National Human Rights Commission have also condemned the murder.

Help needed

It has just been two months since Raj Kumar Rai was told by his doctor that he had a blood disease that needed a bone marrow transplant.

Since then, the world of this 24-year-old car mechanic has fallen apart. He had started feeling weak and bleeding from the mouth, and DB Karki, a doctor at Kathmandu Medical College diagnosed him with aplastic anemia for which there is no treatment available in Nepal. “He urgently needs a bone marrow transplant, and that can only be done in India. If properly treated, he could lead a normal life,” Karki told us. Rai’s family of three brothers are working to collect the money required for the treatment, which is estimated at Rs 700,000. The family has appealed to donors.

Nepal beat South Africa in U-19

Nepal’s cricket powerhouse South Africa in the U-19 World Cup Cricket on Wednesday in Bangladesh, boosting its chances to rise up the rankings.

The Nepal team took on Uganda in Group B Thursday, and a win may vault the team into the Super League. The Nepal teenagers lost by eight wickets to England in the opening game of the tournament. But Wednesday’s win against Test-playing South Africa is a great morale booster. The two countries now have equal points in the tally.

Nepal must score a convincing win against Uganda, or South Africa must either lose to England on Friday. “Let’s pray history will not repeat itself,” Birnaya Raj Pandey of the Cricket Association Nepal (CAN) told Nepalnews.com. In the last World Cup, Nepal was also in a similar predicament, winning a match each with Pakistan. But Pakistan beat England and Nepal had a low run rate.

How it’s done

The Indian modus operandi works in Nepal too

1. Tankers trundle out of the gate.
2. Stop. People openly piller fuels from these tankers in small cans.
3. Filtered fuel is sold cheap (petrol Rs 20 per litre, diesel: Rs 15 per litre) to the casual customer—in this case the customer is the tanker owner itself!
4. Almost every third tanker backs into an enclosed site, locally called hotel, re-emerges after 10-15 minutes and carries on down the roads.

(source: http://www.cseindia.org/)

At the rate of vehicle growth, the situation must be much worse now. In monetary terms, this impact causes the loss of approximately Rs 250,000,000 per year.

Many consumers have lost their faith in the government ever resolving the problem because it is hand-in-glove with the petroleum mafia. They say giving the gas stations another six months already smacks of corruption. Even moving kerosene supply one km away from gas stations is not the answer. “That is just a temporary solution, we must look at subsidies, and improve monitoring and quality control,” says Pro-Public’s Shrestha.
Foreign aid or first aid?
How to spend money when a war is going on

A Maoist banner proclaiming the eight anniversary of the insurgency adorns a suspension bridge in Sindhupalchok last week.

KHADGA SINGH

N
early half of the development projects in the country are either grinding to a halt or have been suspended. The money means for them, much of it from foreign aid, is unspent. The government and Nepal’s donors say they will use the next meeting of the Nepal Development Forum in April to put on their thinking caps about what to do with the unspent budget.

One idea the donors are pushing is to devolve money, even if it is in Maoist-affected areas and could get in the hands of the rebels. They argue that the people are in desperate situations vis-à-vis education, health and food and need urgent help. The government is understandably not keen on the idea, but officials say they are open to discussing it to find a suitable compromise.

At a meeting last week, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa instructed officials to come up with ideas about how to speed up implementation of projects so the money can be spent. Officials who attended the meeting at the National Planning Commission told us that the prime minister was unusually blunt after finding out half of the development projects were not on schedule or had to be abandoned. In the last fiscal year, thirty percent of the development budget was never disbursed, although the people needed the resources desperately.

“We have kept the issue open for discussion during the NDF meet,” the NPC’s Shankar Sharma said. “The donors may have something on their minds. We will listen to each other and then decide on the new modalities for disbursal.”

The government is happy that despite the insurgency and poor performance of projects, donors haven’t really slashed their budgets or pulled out. “We will not abandon Nepal at its hour of need, and donors should not,” David Wood, head of the British aid agency DfID, said in an interview.

But this euphoria among officials may be short-lived. Donor officials say their patience is wearing thin: both with the sluggish progress in development work as well as the stalemate in the peace and parliamentary process. They reluctantly agreed to the World Bank’s $70 million budgetary support in November, but with strict conditions that democracy be restored and the peace process restarted. At the Finance Ministry, officials are happy that there have been commitments of more than Rs 13 billion from donors for the current fiscal year.

Bilateral and multilateral donors are now egging the government to consider involving Maoists in development and, if need be, in the rebels’ strongholds. “You are trapped in between,” said Rudiger Wernk of the European Commission delegation in Kathmandu. “This is why you need to have an arrangement so that the work can go ahead smoothly.” The EC has different programs worth $70 million. The funds have to be spent between 2000-2006.

One of the biggest bilateral donors, DfID, believes Nepal needs a new development model to suit the special circumstances. The agency has been spending Rs 3 billion in Nepal annually and thinks assistance programs should be implemented at the village level for social justice and elimination of discrimination.

“Given the situation Nepal is in, it needs a development model that is different from what it used to be before 1996,” DfID’s Wood says. The agency plans to increase its annual assistance to Nepal to Rs 6.5 billion by 2007. “We are already working toward the direction of a charged development model.”

But even if donors wish to make direct delivery at the village level, development projects will be caught between the Maoists and the government. Both sides will create problems for projects implemented by the other. “If the donors reach an understanding with rebels, security agencies will suspend, and vice-versa,” one aid official who did not want to be named told us. “And the government may be worried the Maoists will take credit for donor-aided projects that are successful in their area.’’

Some donors have informally taken the government’s permission to get projects implemented without using the government network. The German aid agency GTZ and the UN’s WFP Program have decided to launch food security and rehabilitation projects in 15 village development committees of Rukum and Rolpa. WFP’s Quick Impact Program has been going in seven conflict-ridden and food deficit districts.

Even while it claims that it is sideling the Maoists, the government understands that without development projects in the most needy areas, the number of Maoist sympathisers will not decrease significantly. Therefore, it is in the mood to revive the entire gamut of development project issues through a discussion with donors. And that is probably what will dominate the agenda for the Nepal Development Forum in April.

Melamchi in a mess again

After years of slow motion, the Melamchi project has finally ground to a complete halt. The ambitious $464 million scheme to bring glacial melt water to parched Kathmandu through a 28km tunnel is the backbone of the water infrastructure project, and authorities say it is now on hold because of Maoist threats.

Officials from the Melamchi Water Supply Project (MWSP) said their staff had to return to Kathmandu this week after Maoists ordered them to stop work. “The Maoists pasted notices on walls, and we just can’t compromise on the safety of our staff,” one official said. Although Maoist activity has delayed work, this is the first time the rebels have actually forced the project to stop.

The only tangible outcome of the project so far has been a 9km stretch of access road from Melamchi to the headworks of the tunnel in Helambu. The international contractor, Hanil Koneko, has already paid nearly 30 percent of its fee for less than 15 percent of the finished road.

The controversial Melamchi project aims to pipe 170 million litres of water a day to Kathmandu. Critics and experts have charged that it is too expensive, and will only benefit an already pampered capital. They also say cheaper options of storage reservoirs on the Valley rim and upgrading the antiquated and faulty water pipe system.
Balancing rights and wrongs

Ganesh Chilulwal was mourning, but is that not allowed under Maoist law?

The Supreme Court’s angry instruction finally worked: the army headquarters has started receiving habeas corpus petitions filed on behalf of Maoist detainees. HQ’s response also comes as the international community expressed its unhappiness over growing reports of human rights violations by the security forces. Defiance of the judiciary by the security apparatus could have meant an end to the rule of law.

Pressure groups and donors are equally bitter and frustrated over rights violations by the Maoists who have shown they will kill anyone, armed or unarmed. The rebels clearly have double standards on the right to life, depending on whether they are victims or perpetrators.

The Maoist’s ‘Special Taudence’ took the life of Ganesh Chilulwal, president of the Maoist Victims’ Association in the heart of the capital on Sunday, a day after his association burned effigies of Pechvanda and Bahunam, projecting them as ‘killers’. Even from the Maoist point of view, this was bad timing: to shoot an unarmed advocate of non-violence when human rights groups, media and civil society were pressuring the government to probe the incident in the Bhimad area where 20 people, including 18 Maoists, were killed in army action.

Amnesty International was quick off the mark, asking the government to probe whether the 20 were executed after being taken into custody. While the state, including the armed forces, cannot be expected to act in vengeance and in violation of the letter and spirit of the law, it is also time that the Maoists clarify publicly what justifies or legitimises their right to kill those who oppose violence and terror.

Chilulwal’s murder in cold blood only proves the Maoists have little respect for the right to life of anyone who opposes them. The murder also casts doubt on their intentions and sincerity for dialogue at a time when they have called for the UN to mediate in the conflict. Such contempt for human rights makes it imperative that demobilisation be a minimum condition for a future peace process, preferably mediated and monitored by an international agency.

Amnesty and others should ensure that the rebels whose release they seek also support the rights of other citizens and not pose a threat to them simply because they do not subscribe to their political views. In fact, it should be the duty of domestic and international rights groups to procure an undertaking from the detainees that they will not take up violence. Despite its public pronouncements, the Maoist leadership has proved as apathetic, if not more so, in internally probing atrocities committed by their cadres in violation of the party guidelines. The killing of innocents in Taplejung, or the rape of a 49-year-old woman, a mother of five, the attack on Kasuba Prasad Upadhyay during his official trip to Sukhet—have all been on the agenda of their ‘probe’, which were never pursued to the logical end.

This only indicates that the Maoist leadership is either hand-in-glove with renegade perpetrators of crimes, or they can’t annoy those who did it. Chilulwal’s murder may not fall into the above category, but is far more condemning. He was only exercising his democratic right to protest against those who killed his near and dear ones. He was mourning. Is that such a taboo that it warrants a death penalty in Maoist law?
The London dream

Many Nepali-Londoners find their hopes shattered

“I think that England is another form of heaven, I think that if I go to England, I will at once forget my trouble from which I am suffering,” Thus wrote Sunata in a school essay. She knelted hunched over a kerosene lamp, on a gandharia table. It was a warm balmy night in Lyringham.

So, Filmmakers consider Nepal and other are the not only Shangri La — England is a Shangri La too. When asked, the majority of Nepalis here will tell that the London of their pre-migration imagination as a place of tall buildings, pristine streets, organised lives, friendly, highly educated people and success. Yet how many actually end up staying here permanently? Not as many as you would think. This is not only due to visa issues, so why do so many choose to leave?

On arrival here, the London dream can be both confirmed and confounded. Yes, here are the tall buildings, but they are just one aspect of a much bigger picture. There are clear street lights, but they have sandstone, de-individualised houses holding over individualistic people and around the corner are the “flthy” streets that “smell like meat”. There are organised lives: suited chic Londoners eating a-Manghi kharchis. But they send blindly past huddled junkies yanking syringes in spirals of chess-high and parents love.

There is success life in London can reap many rewards. However, a common experience of Londoners tells a different story. Many find themselves caught in a compelling, vicious cycle of earning and spending, like a dog chasing its tail. So, of course, for some, it is not long before “the city loses its inaccessible beauty.”

Going home” to Nepal brings it with the clash of Shangri-La and the lived London experience. It brings identity crisis. In the words of Subhakar Rana in the Guardian, “London is the new names of many layers”. Back in Nepal, can they slip easily into the celebrity role of one who is altogether more modern? Will they tell stories of a land where pumpkins are never out of season, where students have laptops and where there are poor people and children who are overeager? This is a worldlable identity for one returning from the Promised Land, bearing prestigious gifts and the badges of a shifted status. But then, increasingly, the distance from Kathmandu to London can begin to contract and that between self and Nepal home longens.

On the other hand, determined to be as inconspicuous as possible, people might find themselves speaking little of London, temporarily trying to collapse a more recently acquired self with an original Nepali self. One interviewee commented, “why should my family worry about my true living abroad, let them have their dreams”. But simultaneously an urge to challenge the idealisation of London may also be pressing: a returned daughter will tell her mother to allow British visits to help make mooms, while a brother says he believes that development is not “about getting to choose between a range of cars”. In addition, a feeling of protections towards Nepal can also weave into this picture but is incomparable with despair, frustration and embarrassment at the country’s political situation. All these variables together frame a changed and mismatched conglomeration of emotions — sometimes meaning that the return to London after a visit home is a bittersweet relief.

Why such a cocktail of conflicting emotions? One answer may be that we internalise society’s attitudes. People find it hard to see identities as plural, malleable and different in every individual. How often have you been asked whether you feel more Nepali or more British? People want these traits to either be mutually exclusive (as does the Nepali embassy) or else they expect them to be two separate coexisting identities. More often the conscious they are actually merged, one with the other. One Britain’s can be a Nepali Britinshness and vice-versa. In London people can often feel extra Nepal or isolated from Britishness, while back home Britinshness can show up against Nepal identity.

The confusion caused by these expectations of mono-identity is partly what causes the erosion of London’s-Utopia. And, like Western images of Nepal as Shangri-La, this London is revealed as a projection. Thus, in our shrinking world, Nepali Londoners tend to find that any expectations, like Sunata’s of a heavenly England, explode into fragments.

Double loading

MUDA BAJRACHARYA

Maya Thakuri was three months pregnant. Her husband, Jay Ram Thakuri, was worried that this was complicating his relationship with his first wife.

So, he had been shopping around. He chose Manakamana Medical Hall in Koteswor where the fee was Rs 5,000 — considerably less than other pharmacies. When she was taken in, Maya was unaware her husband was getting her an abortion.

According to legal depostions at the Kathmandu District Court, Guna Raj Awasthi performed the operation. Soon after, Maya started having severe abdominal pains, vomited and her blood pressure dropped alarmingly. She was rushed to Teaching Hospital, but died on the way. The post-mortem result showed probable cause was “amniotic fluid embolism”, essentially a broken abortion.

Awasthi and two nurses from the clinic were cited by Maya’s brother and were detained, but were later released on bail. The doctor and his staff deny that they performed an abortion on Maya, saying she had come for a check-up and died from a spontaneous medical condition.

Maya Thakuri died three months before the cabinet in January passed a directive laying out terms and conditions under which hospitals can perform abortions. This follows up on a two-year-old law that makes abortions legal in certain situations. Under the new directive, only registered medical institutions and doctors with valid licenses can perform abortions, which can only be done with the woman’s consent, and only if the foetus is less than 12 weeks old. In cases of incest and rape, abortions are allowed up to 18 weeks.

But till the directives are finalised, the regulations enforced and the law followed, women’s rights activists say, there will be more unnecessary deaths of women like Maya in under-equipped and clandestine clinics.

When Sabina Shrestha became pregnant for the third time after having two daughters, her ultrasound showed the baby was also a girl. She came to a clinic in Faran known for secretly performing abortions. The doctor told her that ultrasonic sex-selection was unlawful, but said he could perform a DNA test to find out. When she spoke to her baby, Sabina was unsure that she would be breaking the law if she went through with a sex-selective abortion.

Aside from a lack of awareness among women about the new law, abortion is also a class issue. Urban-based women have always had access to safe abortion, without fear of criminal sanction. And because they can afford it, they get discrete and safe medical attention. Poorer mothers, burdened by previous girl children or husbands who force them to have unsafe abortions do not have that choice. That is when abortions become a life-and-death issue not just for the foetus, but also for the mother. Although specialists say sex-selective abortions are not as common in Nepal as in China or India, it is a growing phenomenon and could be one of the unforeseen consequences of partial legalisation of abortion without proper guidelines and enforcement.

“It is the duty of the medical community and practitioners to lay down the ground rules and follow them,” said Bhola Rijal, a maternal health doctor. “A good law is not enough, we need it to be implemented with a strict code of ethics.” He says some unethical doctors are earning money by claiming they can tell the sex of a child even within a few weeks of pregnancy. Ultimately, Rijal admin, sex preference for boys is more difficult to change and can only happen with a transformation in societal values.

Sapuna Pradhan Mall has been trying to provide legal assistance to women convicted of abortion who are in jail. Most of the 35 women currently serving sentences are poor and illiterate. Men are rarely charged even though they coerced women into having abortions. “The only way we can address this problem is by raising the status of Nepali women with literacy and awareness, boosting their self-esteem and empowering them,” says Mall.

But such behaviour change will take time. What can be done till then? For now, activists like Mall want all the women in jail for abortion to be released, and for the regulations in hospitals to be passed urgently so more women do not lose their lives in unsafe and underground clinics.

“Women don’t have the negotiating power to have a child, have no access to family planning, they are compelled to give birth or terminate a pregnancy and when they do have a child, they don’t even have the power to confer it Nepal citizenship,” Malla says.

Malli Magar was 16 when she was raped by a co-worker in a restaurant in the Valley. She was so young, she didn’t even know she was pregnant. She started falling sick so decided to go home to her family in Dhading. There, she had a miscarriage. But the neighbours complained to the police that she had killed her baby after it was born. She was sentenced to six months in jail for infanticide. After spending three years and seven months in detention, she was released in February 2003 with help from the Rural Women’s Development and Unity Centre. She is now living at the centre’s rehabilitation unit where she is getting skills training. For the first time in her young life, Malli is optimistic about her future.

“Impisoned women have suffered injustice and need help to get back into society,” says Sambhu Jung Kuna at the centre. Despite her suffering, Malli is luckier than most. For thousands of other women who will be forced to have unsafe abortions, the government’s new rules and medical directives will be meaningless unless they are shown to work.

More importantly, Nepal society also has to change and treat women better.

Some of the names of the women in this article have been changed.
some 50,000 visitors will have thronged to the automobile show 2004 in Kathmandu by the time it ends this weekend. “This is the most appropriate forum for the automobile sector,” says Bishakha Chhetri, chief executive of Global Exposure and Management Services (GEMS) and organiser of the event for the third time since it started in 1996. The five-day show, which started on 18 February, includes both national and international players displaying both new and old models of four and two wheelers. On display are also all-terrain and classic cars. “We are confident this show will help promote the automobile industry and market its services,” says Chhetri. GEMS also organises exhibits, exhibitions and interiors and lifestyle products in Nepal.

Well-oiled palms

Dealers, government and consumer activists are all to blame

Our investigation [shows] that the moment the mother stock of petrol and diesel dropped from Nepal to India, there is systematic adulteration every step of the way along the side of the highway to the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) depot at Kathmandu.

Strictly Business

Ashutosh Tiwari

Ambikagjhi, in the distribution network from Ambikagjhi to Kathmandu, at petrol pumps all over the country. The protection racket goes up the NOC ranks, to the politicians. And everybody gets his share.

So reported this newspaper in December 2000. Kirantha Upreti of Chitwan’s New Sita Oil even said: “There is no way I could make a profit without mixing kerosene with petrol and diesel.” At the time, this widely published revelation met with no hue and cry from the politically powerful and arrogant local Babadhar-Shrestha-forever Nepal Consumers’ Forum (NCF).

In fact, judging from the then lauding of consumer rights advocates, the notion that our government official along with their political masters were in bed with petrol suppliers to sell diluted petrol to unsuspecting consumers was just another bitterly predictable story on corruption.

Or was it?

Suddenly, the story got interesting.

Madan Raj Sharma, the immediate past general manager of NOC, is now in jail—arraigned on graft charges. On its own, his arrest symbolised the corruption in NOC. The government sent our letter to private owners of petrol depots, asking them to sell kerosene separately, from a location that is at least a km from their existing business. Unhappy with that, the Nepal Petroleum Dealers’ Association (NPDA)—the Nepal Media Society equivalent of petrol depot owner (ie, another cartel)—called together its members to shut down all depots for now.

The result is that despite NOC’s assurance that too, it are adequate petroleum products in the country, one can, at the time this piece is being written, only buy them at a few state-run depots. But if there’s anyone to be blamed, it’s all three groups, NPDA, the government and NCF, but for different reasons. NOC, despite its high-sounding name, rarely undertakes any proactive search and preventative inspections on behalf of consumers it purports to represent. Looking at which way the political winds are blowing, it is reduced to merely haggling the media with predictably safe comments too late and with that, too, only after issues have come to a boil pointing.

In case too, its prolonged silence in the face of the December 2000 moral outrage should tell all sensible Nepalis that this organisation lacks credibility when it comes to really pushing for consumer rights all the time.

In its role an open secret that government officials were in cahoots with NPDA members. But the government only came clean in its tune. “If one’s ever been heard it, it’s like one that’s first” said one observer. “The other is apparently. This is what happened here, Parvan Nepal is sitting in a corner like a betrayed friend.

Still, much of the blame should go to NPDA. Not only was it pursuing a myopic strategy to adulterate petrol with the government as a silent partner, it’s also stuck in an industry in which the government is the one and only authorised supplier. Short of getting out of this lucrative business altogether, the NPDA members have no choice but to let the petrol prices rise any more, or come around to agree with whatever the government says, which, as this page goes to press on Tuesday evening, I predict they will do.”

The politics of business outsourcing

The problem of taking jobs from the poor in rich countries to the rich in poor countries must be addressed

S everal years ago in Delhi, I called a pest control firm to treat my apartment for bedbugs. When the man arrived, he spoke with a pleasing smile arrived with canisters of another’s assurance. Common standards in a administer another dose.

Airways links Kathmandu to Doha and Kuala Lumpur 14 times a week delivery of aircraft represented the airline’s biggest. “This sort of fleet of 52 aircraft during the next five years. 2002, nearly 20 percent of the industry,” said the Nepal Tourism Agreement that will allow airlines from both countries to operate up to exteriors and interiors and lifestyle products in Nepal.

The impact of business process outsourcing (BPO) on many developing nations’ labour markets is a case in point. With technology-driven business processes demanding more communication and increasing bandwidth, many jobs that were done in industrialised nations, but that did not require face-to-face interaction, can now be moved to poorer countries, which have cheap labour, an educated workforce, and high rates of computer literacy.

America’s General Electric was one of the pioneers here. GE has saved $340 million annually since shifting some of its back-office operations in its IT-enabled offshore services sector, from 106,000 in March 2002 to 171,500 a year later. According to the latest projections, employment will cross one million by 2008.

India has been a major and growing outsourcing location for Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, British Airways and other major corporations. Mauritius has been luring off-shore workers in the US and moving operations to Brazil, China and its plant in Chihuahua, Mexico. Poor nations lock into these facts and trends with hope, while many industrialised countries view them with anxiety. One audience member in Helsinki told me independently that she had sought assurance from some of their friends lost their jobs through no fault of their own (ie, outsourcing). Chetna has devised a move to some European plants’ operations to China.

Some economists dismiss such complaints as merely fuel for protectionism. Wrong. Poor workers in rich countries are the most vulnerable to BPO. Such matters, if not dealt with carefully, can fuel nationalism and populism. On the Ku-Klux Klan’s Web site, economics now fears for space with race hatred. Indeed, the two combine to produce a neatly perverse analysis: globalisation is bad because it gives our race’s jobs to other races in developing nations.

When a corporation outsourcing operations to a developing country, some of its incumbent workers really do lose out (at least the short run). Of course, many other groups gain. Workers in the host country, such as software technicians and call-center operators, staff from BPO, but so do shareholders and company owners (whose profits grow) and consumers (who pay lower prices). Many gain—and are well placed to compensate the losers. To this extent, developed countries’ bear a responsibility for cushioning the impact on their workers by providing adequate social welfare protection, together with relocation and re-training benefits.

Indeed, such measures are crucial in the long term, because if BPO makes developing countries better off, their demand for goods and services will grow. This will create new jobs in rich countries—and more than were lost to BPO. But they may not be in the concentrated, visible sectors that really need to be developed. This makes BPO an easy target for populists, which is unfortunate because what developed countries really need is a flexible workforce. If BPO were stopped, industrialised nations—and their workers—would be worse off in absolute terms. (Project Syndicate)

Kashikbu Basu is Professor of Economics and Director, Program on Comparative Economic Development, at Cornell University.
The world spends $1,000 billion a year on weapons and only $57 billion on development aid

Countries have massive financial gaps standing between them and achieving the millennium goals. The gaps have arisen when the world has never had as many resources as now to meet such goals, the report says.

UNDP’s Mark Malloch Brown told the conference the problem was known, the solution was known, what was lacking was “the political will to implement them.”

Market-led globalisation deprives the poorest people of resources in order to increase the living standards of the rich, Brazilian President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva told the closing session over a satellite link. “This is unacceptable,” Lula said. “The world has enough resources to satisfy the needs of a population twice as big as the present one. But it lacks the political will to concentrate them.”

Lula called for a special tax on weapons sales to create and international fund to pay for development. “It would provide us with enough resources to launch a consistent global development policy,” he said.

Malloch Brown warned of a growing gap between emerging countries and less developed ones. “The emerging countries are improving their living standards,” he said. But the poorest countries have seen their human development indexes shrink as never before. At this pace, in sub-Saharan Africa the UN development goals will be achieved only in 2147.

But he added that despite failures in implementation, the millennium declaration has helped create a global awareness of the development problems and the emergence of a civil society demanding solutions. The elite have understood that it is not enough to call for good governance.

“What counts now is to have real results in health, in education, in access to clean water,” he said. “The manifestos for the 21st century is to set social and environmental priorities, and to fulfill the moral obligation of the Northern hemisphere towards the South.”

Removal of subsidies is central to that, said Dutch parliamentarian and forum chairman Bert Koenders. “Donors cannot provide aid to create development opportunities with one hand and then use trade restrictions to take those opportunities away with the other.”

The European Commission says its budgetary outlay will reflect its commitment to the UN’s millennium development goals. “The enlarged Union must play a greater role, as regional leader as well as a global partner,” Commission president Romano Prodi said at the launch of the budget last week. “To meet these expectations implies developing the EU into a politically responsible actor capable of punching its weight.”

The Commission proposed a budget of $14.6 billion for 2007, but detailed figures on where this money will be spent have not been published.

But the Commission has indicated that the only component that would need increased resources is security, saying it would like Europe to respond to “fundamental threats of terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states, internal and regional conflicts”.

Lobby groups are concerned the money will be diverted on strategic security and not on development cooperation and humanitarian aid. “Europe’s growing external responsibilities have to be matched with an increase in the money allocated to development cooperation,” says Simon Stocker, director of Europe, a Brussels-based network of NGOs.

“This is necessary to tackle the root causes of fundamentalism.” Activists want the Commission to divert money from subsidies to European agriculture to development cooperation. “It makes no sense to maintain high export subsidies on agricultural products, which leads to dumping in the developing world at a time when we want a coherent strategy to fight poverty,” Stocker said.

Dutch deportations

The Dutch parliament on Tuesday gave the green light to deport some 36,000 asylum seekers back to their home countries. The applicants, many of them from Africa and Asian countries including Nepal, have lived in the Netherlands for years, must leave over a three-year period. Only 2,300 will be allowed to stay.

The controversial decision has been greeted with howls of protest from the Dutch people, who have a reputation for tolerance. However, there has been a growing anti-immigrant feeling among centre-right supporters of the Dutch people, who have a reputation for tolerance. However, there has been a growing anti-immigrant feeling among centre-right supporters of the Dutch people, who have a reputation for tolerance.

The decision will affect asylum seekers who came to the Netherlands before 1 April 2001, and most of those affected are Yugoslavians, Albanians, Iraqis and Afghans. Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende’s government has gone further than the policies of controversial anti-immigrant politician Pim Fortuyn, who was shot dead ahead of parliamentary elections in 2002.

Two-thirds of the Dutch people oppose the move, as well as human rights groups and the Dutch Council of Churches. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Dutchman Ruud Lubbers, has also expressed concern.

EU gets stingy

The EU could downgrade its aid to developing countries in its next budget, transferring money to needy new members as well as diverting money to security.

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Nomad’s Land

Jill Gocher portrays the hardy Khampa of eastern Tibet

There may be a reason why Australian photographer and writer, Jill Gocher, was fascinated by the Khampa. They are both nomads.

Gocher has been living and working in Asian countries for the past 20 years, spending a lot of time in Indonesia—that vast archipelago of 15,000 islands which is a world in itself. But more recently she has discovered the Himalayas and its peoples.

Today, she divides her time between Singapore and Nepal, writing, photographing and exploring. The recurring theme in her work is of people and cultures which are struggling to survive against the relentless tide of soulless modernity. Says Jill: “Traditional values and lifestyles give meaning and balance to life, a fact that we in the West are slowly coming to realise.”

Too often, though, the East is so busy trying to catch up with the West it doesn’t realise what it is losing. This is where documentary-like Jill Gocher comes in, many times, to remind us of what is precious in our own societies. The Khampa are Tibet’s “cowboys”: exuberant, hard-working, family-oriented, and devoutly Buddhist. The historic kingdom of Khamp was always “more Tibetan than Tibet” even though its people do not live within the territory of modern-day Tibetan Autonomous Region.

The Khampas earned a reputation as fearless guerrilla fighters in the anti-Chinese resistance after Tibet was occupied in the 1950s. Many Khampa were based in guerrilla camps in Mustang and carried out hit-and-run attacks on the plateau, until they were wiped out in a Royal Nepali Army action in 1975.

“Every year, Kham is becoming less remote. Earlier only very few extremely determined people could go there,” says Gocher. Since Kham is not a part of Tibet, tourists don’t need permits and this makes it even more accessible to outsiders.

Gocher doesn’t like to think that her portraits are of a dying people. “Yes, the spirit of the Khampa may be eroding, but this exhibition is a celebration of their dignity and deep values.” The photographer has deliberately chosen black and white. “Colour is distracting, black and white forces us to focus on what is important: the interplay of light and shade and composition.”

Gocher points to a picture of a child lama in the courtyard of a monastery in oblique light. “This came out well, it wasn’t posed, I just happened to capture the moment when this gorgeous, precious little lama was walking across the light,” she says. The black and whites are taken with Jill’s 50-year-old Leica. “It is a very silent camera, and every photo is a meditation. The lightmeter is here,” she says, tapping her head with a finger.

But the process of developing is not so old-fashioned. The pictures are scanned, edited on Photoshop through a digital process and turned back into bromide prints. This technique has allowed Jill to subtly insert colour where you least expect it amidst the light septic: the surprising red tint of a coral on a horseman’s ring, a red silk braid on the stylish hair of a Khampa in a fedora.

Ironically, it is through Jill Gocher’s exhibition that the Khampas may be able to come a full circle to Mustang. Lamas from a monastery in Mustang will be performing at the inauguration on Friday and it is intriguing to think that some of them could actually be offspring of Khampas who once used to be based in Nepal’s trans-Himalayan regions.

Kham—Portraits of Eastern Tibet by Jill Gocher From 20 February 18, 2004 Siddhartha Art Gallery, 421 8046

Sunsilk Naturals. Specially selected ingredients for your unique hair needs

Do you find that even after you have shampooed your hair, it feels dull and listless? Wake up to a whole new world of Sunsilk Naturals. Full of the goodness of amla and sunflower for dull hair. And the gentleness of card and lemon to cleanse dandruff away. And henna and lotus flower to strengthen weak hair. Now, let the genuine goodness of nature care for your hair.
the Beetle is alive and kicking in Nepal. Once stopped in its native Germany, the cult of to drive what is, quite frankly, an antique. Dhulikhel on 13 March. However, two decades after production when a swarm of Beetles of all ages a timewarp for the uninitiated, but for those familiar with explain the special bond between Beetle owners and their cars, but says: “People like them because they are rare and antique, and also because they are comfortable.” Dangol himself owns a red Beetle (see picture) which came first in the rally last year. He says driving a Beetle takes a little getting used to, but the durability of the Bug and its parts means that maintenance isn’t as much of a problem. With regular checkups Beetles do just fine and will take this year’s drive

The moving force behind the charity and rally are New Zealander Susan Floods and paediatric surgeon Naryan Thapa from Nepal. The two decided to combine their common interest in Volkswagen Beetles (their own white and black Bugs respectively) for a cause. The rally became a way to raise money for those who can’t afford the procedure even at minimal cost. With an estimated 40,000 Nepalis with cleft lip and palate, the ten operations sponsored by last year’s rally may seem to be just a drop in the bucket. Even so, organisers hope that the next rally will have as many as 20 more participants than the 36 last year. The project is gaining momentum as more Beetle owners become aware of the rally and its cause, not to mention the fun of “dressing up” the car and taking it for a long drive. These are people who take their cars very seriously—lavishing time, money and TLC on their Bugs. Shantu Kumar Dangol is one of the few Nepalis who will tolerate their Bugs in Kathmandu. Dangol can’t exactly explain the special bond between Beetle owners and their cars, but says: “People like them because they are rare and antique, and also because they are comfortable.” Dangol himself owns a red Beetle (see picture) which came first in the rally last year. He says driving a Beetle takes a little getting used to, but the durability of the Bug and its parts means that maintenance isn’t as much of a problem. With regular checkups Beetles do just fine and will take this year’s drive.

No full Stops in India

The Beetle has such unique features—rear engine and air-cooling system—that its parts are not readily interchangeable with those from other vehicles. However, local mechanics have found ways of giving an old Beetle a heart bypass if it needs one by replacing old parts, modifying and cannibalising organs from junked models.

(Jemima Sherpa)

susan@ics.wink.com.np
suresh@wink.com.np

AUTO MATIC
Mark Tully

The moving force behind the charity and rally are New Zealander Susan Floods and paediatric surgeon Naryan Thapa from Nepal. The two decided to combine their common interest in Volkswagen Beetles (their own white and black Bugs respectively) for a cause. The rally became a way to raise money for those who can’t afford the procedure even at minimal cost. With an estimated 40,000 Nepalis with cleft lip and palate, the ten operations sponsored by last year’s rally may seem to be just a drop in the bucket. Even so, organisers hope that the next rally will have as many as 20 more participants than the 36 last year. The project is gaining momentum as more Beetle owners become aware of the rally and its cause, not to mention the fun of “dressing up” the car and taking it for a long drive. These are people who take their cars very seriously—lavishing time, money and TLC on their Bugs. Shantu Kumar Dangol is one of the few Nepalis who will tolerate their Bugs in Kathmandu. Dangol can’t exactly explain the special bond between Beetle owners and their cars, but says: “People like them because they are rare and antique, and also because they are comfortable.” Dangol himself owns a red Beetle (see picture) which came first in the rally last year. He says driving a Beetle takes a little getting used to, but the durability of the Bug and its parts means that maintenance isn’t as much of a problem. With regular checkups Beetles do just fine and will take this year’s drive

Her Excellency, the Ambassador

Why I care so much about the car nobody likes

the freedom of the middle of the road no matter how narrow and many other hazards, mean that breakdowns and accidents are both bound to be frequent on the Indian roads. Here again, the Ambassador scores. Over the many years that the brand dominated the Indian roads, there has grown up an efficient and cheap vehicle recovery system. Almost every village on a main road has its mini or mechanic, who knows the Ambassador like the back of his grained hand.

The Ambassador is the beneficiary of those years of economic planning when industrialists had to get a license from the government to make any investment, the notorious “license permit raj”. Licensing enabled some 20 families to retain a stranglehold over the industrial economy by using their influence with politicians and bureaucrats to ensure that their products were not threatened by competition.

It wasn’t until the early 1980s that the Ambassador faced any competition which might have threatened it. Despite the arrival of the Maruti, the ancient Ambassador still retains a sizeable share of the market.

But India is a land which values tradition, and so even after other competition has arrived in the market, Hindustan Motors say they have no intention of phasing out the Ambassador. So the lady lives on.

Mark Tully is the author of No full Stops in India (Penguin, 1991) and worked for the BBC out of New Delhi for 25 years.
Feeling patriotic? Go for Hulas’ range of Made in Nepal LCVs

They may not have the same finish, the same elegant aerodynamic lines of their Japanese rivals but Made in Nepal Sherpa vans and light commercial vehicles are sturdy, cheap and, their manufacturers say, made for Nepali road conditions. After eight years of being tested on our potholes, Sherpas have now ironed out all the kinks and attained new self-confidence to compete with the big brands.

This is not the first time that the name Sherpa has been borrowed by a car manufacturer. The other one is Austin Rover’s Sherpa van in Britain. But those were 100 percent homegrown vehicles put together by Hulas Motors of Biratnagar.

“We take pride in our Sherpa,” says executive director, Surendra Ghoshal. “There is very good scope for a light commercial vehicle (LCV) in Nepal and we have a product that is ideally suited.” While the design chassis and tyres of the Sherpa are Nepali, the engine and gearboxes are Chinese.

The original model Sherpa 86 (D3) had a 5+1 gear and a top speed of 100 km/h with 12 km/l—all for up to Rs 790,000. There is now a whole new lineup from Hulas that includes the Sherpa 13-seater double cabin jeep, Sherpa mini truck, Sherpa Mini-V van (Rs 500,000) and soon to be unveiled will be the luxury Mustang LCV which will come fully equipped with power steering, air conditioner, 2.5 l engine, radial tyres and leather seats. And all this for Rs 900,000, one-fourth the price of a comparable imported brand.

Hulas is hoping for a production run of 20 cars a month. Sherpa owners are all praise for their vehicle, some of it tinged with patriotic pride that their country has finally made it to the league of those that produce cars. But what they like most of all about their Sherpas are the price tags! ●

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Songs in sheep's clothing

Woolgathering and rediscovering Bheda ko oon jasto.

It started, if the word can be used in context of a documentary, journalist Narayan Wagle, and Amrit Gurung and Daniel Karthak of the well-known Nepali rock band Nepathya, Wagle, who heard the tune on a Langtang trek sings it for the musicians who decide to trace the origins of the song—a journey that takes them to the ghets of Thulo Syabru and Gosainkunda.

The song, Bheda ko oon jasto, however, currently exists in three avatars: what the shepherds sing in the high mountains below Langtang, the Nepathya remake that followed the documentary and singer Deepesh Kishore Bharatari’s Bheda ko oon jasto that was released last year. It seems no one owns a folk song; it belongs to the people, so different versions—interpretations—are one tune around. In Western music, it bears a passing resemblance to the Grateful Dead’s prolific takes and retakes, just better.

Snatches of the song from the documentary are atmospheric. The people sing the Nepali and Tibetan lyrics with a Tibetan accent and beat, true to their roots. They sing about what they know: lover’s cheeks that are as red as the apples of Syabru and of course, clouds that look like sheep’s wool. Deepesh Kishore Bharatari is known for his folk songs and his version launches straight into the original song with backdrops going shakachuk and an overt synth presence. The occasional whooop of Ya ha! and the ubiquitous flute interval is perhaps an attempt to maintain folk credibility. But Bharatari’s sound is a pseudo-folk, if there is such a genre; the folk song has undergone a pop metamorphosis to take on urban sensibilities for the city listener.

Which isn’t to say Nepathya have a faithful rendition of Bheda ko oon. But they do have a 38 second introduction that incorporates folk instruments. While Bharatari picked pop, Nepathya relied on rock overtones for a more contemporary feel. The ‘shakachuk’ is replaced by ‘sahashuk’—a sound viewers will recall from the documentary, and the synthesiser is replaced by guitar riff and drums. Nepathya rejects the lift for punchy energy that is reflected in the way lead vocalist Gurung delivers the lyrics in a distinctly Sherpa cadence.

In the final analysis, one is not better than the other. They just present different facets to a tune that is copyrighted all Nepal. And we are grateful for whatever way our music thrives, “Lok ghee belongs to the people, so it’s unfair to call into question artistic interpretations,” says Deepesh Shrestha, program director at FM 106.2. “However, I will say that I prefer Bharatari’s rendition because the style and arrangement is more appropriate to the song, besides Nepathya had something to work off when they released their version. The bottom line is that neither have true Nepali ‘jam’.

With rumours of a hip hop outfit going into the studio to record their take on Bheda ko oon jasto, no matter what we make of it, one thing is assured: the song will survive long into the future.

TRISHNA GURUNG

In a country that has nursery rhymes about flies on the wall, it’s not surprising to find the song of the moment is not about unrequited love—even in February—but about sheep’s wool. Everybody seems to be singing or humming, Bheda ko oon jasto, and most don’t know more than these four words.

The popularity of the song was helped by the documentary Bheda ko oon jasto... an search of a song that played during Film South Asia ’03, and has just completed a screening tour in towns across Nepal to packed halls and enthusiastic crowds.

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SONGS

One song

SRADDHA BANSYAT in LANGTANG

About half way between Llama Hotel and Ghode Tabela, at 2,770m, Kaisang Sherpa comes out of the trailside lodge singing a song. It is the current folk hit, Bheda ko oon jasto, and Kaisang’s breath comes out in puffs of vapour in the cold air as he sings. “We learned it from friends who sing it around here, it’s a fun song, but more from the Helambu side. Here, we sing Tibetan songs,” he tells us. Kaisang hadn’t heard of the Nepathya version from the documentary of the same name, which was filmed on the other side of the mountain from here in Gosainkunda, or the one released earlier by Deepesh Kishore Bharatari, so we decided to test both songs to see which one he liked. He listened intently on the earphones to Bharatari’s version and repeated the line likening the sweet taste of Kanchi’s cheek to the songs to see which one he liked.

Kaisang then goes back to his kitchen chores, launching into his own version: “Bheda ko oon jasto.”
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If Iraq’s prospects are as dismal as my analysis suggests, any international contribution to the US-driven reconstruction effort is likely to be little more than money flushed down the drain. This does not mean that the world should abandon Iraq, but the international community should direct its money to humanitarian cases, such as hospitals and schools, rather than backing American designs. The World Bank and other institutions considering assistance through loans face even greater difficulties. Piling more debt onto Iraq’s already huge obligations will only make matters worse. If Iraq’s economy falters as a result of a misguided economic reconstruction program based on shock therapy, the country will be further indebted with little to show for it. The dream of Iraq’s American invaders was to create a stable democracy and democratic Middle East. But America’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos.

**Forged Portuguese passports, anyone?**

**MARIO DE QUEIROZ IN LISBON**

"Worried about your future and wish to keep your family’s options open? Take advantage of the benefits of Portuguese nationality, which is available to all people from Goa."

Passports to sell for a paltry sum to organised crime rings. Take advantage of the benefits of Portuguese nationality, which is available to all people from Goa. Worried about your future and wish to keep your family’s options open? Passports to sell for a paltry sum to organised crime rings. Take advantage of the benefits of Portuguese nationality, which is available to all people from Goa. Worried about your future and wish to keep your family’s options open? Passports to sell for a paltry sum to organised crime rings. Take advantage of the benefits of Portuguese nationality, which is available to all people from Goa. Worried about your future and wish to keep your family’s options open?

If Portugal’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos, Portugal’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos, Portugal’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos, Portugal’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos, Portugal’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos.
India’s and Pakistan’s governments are still flattering with each other at the diplomatic level, but their film industries are already falling in love—signing up artists from the country otherwise dominated across the border, planning joint productions and promising peace through the silver screen.

In short, the snail-paced progress at the political level is yielding a rapid snowball effect in the area of people-to-people ties, business, trade and cricket. Major headway is being made in film. Interaction between Bollywood and Lollywood has been growing in recent years.

Despite an official ban on Indian movies in Pakistan they are freely available here on video and DVD. The government has restricted no ban to only the commercial screening of Indian movies.

“Joint movies by India and Pakistan will certainly give a real value to peace efforts at the official level for millions of people. That we can actually work together and co-exist will be the message that people will get sitting in their living rooms,” says Ayub Khan, a schoolteacher and movie buff.

This may just be true. Meera, Pakistan’s highest paid actress and heartthrob of its movie industry, has been signed for a Bollywood movie to be co-produced by Indian Bhumikha Mahesh Bhatt and Pakistan-born British producer Sevy Ali. Meera will play the lead role in the Hindi thriller that is about a blind woman who becomes psychic after an eye transplant and can see murders in a red light area before they are committed.

“Although Meera’s seems to be just another traditionally plotted movie, it underlines the beginning of an era of new politics between Pakistan and India that seek to establish perpetual peace,” comments Amir Waisam, a journalist. “This would be like breaking the cultural barriers that the two states had artificially erected to create artificial distances between the two peoples.

Despite separate entities, the movies churned out by the two industries carried similar cultural and traditional undertones and were hardly distinguishable. Both countries allowed the commercial screening of each other’s movies till they went to war in 1965. Political and diplomatic differences subsequently erected cultural blockade.

“I understand that there would be many at home who will oppose my decision, but whatever I am doing is for peace. Can anybody come out and oppose me?” asks Meera. She had turned down two roles offered to her by Bollywood producers last year due to state-level tensions. Another Pakistani top actress, Reham, and well-known Pakistan poet-lyricist poetry singer, Rashid Ali Khan, are close to signing contracts, while many others in both are waiting.

Similarly, Meera has contracted famous Indian choreographer Sanu Khan to direct dance sequences in one of the movies she is producing in Pakistan. Indian actress-turned-director Pooja Bhatt, who visited Pakistan in December 2003, is ready to direct a Pakistani movie. Pakistan’s most popular band, Junoon, has already composed a song for Pooja’s debut movie, screened in the Pakistani city of Karachi during the Kara Film festival in December.

The Pakistan government, on the other hand, is also taking the movie diplomacy seriously. Pakistani Foreign Minter Khurshid Kasuri has asked Indian filmmakers to stop making movies that spew hate. Such movies grow in number after the Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan, as producers from both countries cashed in on the political climate of animosity.

Real peace to reel peace

The film industries of India and Pakistan are falling in love

The Pakistan’s highest paid actress, Meera (left), will act in a Bollywood thriller, while Pooja Bhatt (above) will direct a Pakistani movie.
“The word democracy doesn’t exist in the Maoist lexicon”

Excerpts of editorials from three national dailies:

Kantipur, 17 February

The killing of Nepal Maoist Victims’ Association Chairman Ganesh Chilwalu is the latest example of the rebel group’s fascist streak and its political bankruptcy. Such demonic and brutal revenge against someone who believes in peaceful opposition to their excesses puts a question-mark over the Maoists’ political belief and character, and throws doubt over their public commitment. Ganesh Chilwalu opposed Maoist violence and struggled for the relief and rehabilitation of the victims of Maoist violence. The effigies of Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai were set alight. If that was the reason why he was murdered, then that is a dangerous warning from the Maoists to civil society. Those involved in the politics of violence must be called tyrants. The Chilwalu episode is a challenge for the Maoist leadership that has been trying to convince the world of its tolerance and democratic credentials. The Maoists have exposed their double standards and shown they are unlikely and opportunistic. By killing those who don’t agree with them, the Maoists are pushing the country down a spiral of violence.

Rahkuri, 17 February

By killing Ganesh Chilwalu, the Maoists have gagged the Maoist victims. The murder goes completely contrary to what they professed. It has proved that the Maoists’ public commitment of not killing political figures was just a ploy.

Nepalgunj addressed: A king has to be seen and heard. Democracy has been undermined, students have been provoked by the parties, stress on elections.

Elephant murders

Kantipur, 16 February

A 50-year-old Sumanri woman faces court charges for killing an elephant. The pachyderm died at Mina Bhujel’s house in Panchayan nearly two months ago after she installed live wires around her granary. A week before the incident, the same elephant had eaten almost all her stored maize. Although officials at the DFO filed a case against her, they are sympathetic. “We feel sorry for the loss she suffered, but we have no choice,” says DFO Shambhu Prasad Chauhan. “If we let her go, there could be other incidents of elephant murders.” Kharma Bahadur Dahal, another farmer in Sumanri, also faced a similar trial after an elephant was electrocuted in his sugarcane field. He was released from police custody after paying bail of Rs 50,000.

Elephants that arrive in hundreds and raid their fields regularly plague locals in the district. They also suffer huge losses when the animals eat their grain storage. With no other recourse available to them, many have installed live wire devices to keep the marauders at bay. Those convicted of killing elephants have to pay between Rs 50,000 and Rs 100,000 or serve five to 15 years in prison according to the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act.

Same side

BPF spokesperson Roshan Karki in Rajdhani, 16 February

“The king’s speech in Nepalgunj last week has opened doors for dialogue between the monarch and the political parties. I say this because both the king and the

“I want to give it another try”

Narayan Singh Pun in Dharati, 17 February

- Everyone in Nepal knows that peace must be established in the country. Even the international community says so. But how do we do that? We can’t use guns against the Maoists just because they are rebels. There should be efforts for peace, only then will the peace process begin. But there are no peace moves at the moment. I want to give it another trial and be responsible for restarting the peace process. We cannot expect an environment for peace to appear spontaneously. We have to make it happen.
- There are many kinds of rebellion. Given the principles that the ‘people’s war’ is based on and the phase it has entered, it would be wrong to think that it can be quelled by force. That cannot be done. It could take a long time, the government may be able to weaken it but not eliminate the problem.
- This problem has two parts: military and political. There are economic and social aspects in between as well. Even if the Maoists are militarily weakened, the political aspect will remain, their ideology cannot be killed. It will keep resurrecting. To solve that permanently, dialogue is the only way.
- The adverse effects of the Maoist problem will not be limited to our country. Our neighbours will be affected, so will the rest of the world. There are 84 Maoists in the central committee and 15 in the politburo. That is perhaps why the government played down the handling over of the two Maoist leaders by Indian authorities.
- Talks are possible even if the present government that forced the Maoists back to the jungle, is allowed to continue. Politics is everything is possible. We have neither opposed Surya Bahadur Thapa nor supported him. I have this question to ask: why is someone who has been repeatedly unsuccessful brought to power? This is our country’s bad luck.
- The king will not be successful if he allows unsuccessful people to run the country.
- I am nobody’s adviser, I say what I see. What we want is a democratic election where there is a level-playing field. How can elections be held when there is a group that is using guns? Until the political parties can move about freely, elections are not possible.
Life is a circus

Amauzapata, 15 February

It’s a dreadful scene. Young Nepali girls perform risky tricks in skimpy outfits. In this circus they jump without a safety net, walk on tightropes, stand on a beer bottle, ride a unicycle and balance three other girls on their shoulders. The Nepali audience is mesmerised as they watch the girls, some as young as three. The audience doesn’t seem bothered by the fact that the girls are all exploited by the Indian circus.

For the past several weeks in Jhapa, the Asia Circus from Banaras has put on daily shows with performances by Nepali girls who are from Makawanpur and adjoining districts. Instead of raising their voices against the exploitation of Nepali girls who are usually sold to the circus by impoverished families, the local government authorities and others watch them without any guilt. Abdul Gaffar, the circus manager, says his circus runs in Nepal with the help of local Kameo Shaha from Heretauda.

Anita Chhapagain, 18, from Heretauda says she was “supplied” by her parents to an agent and then taken to India via Birgunj and sold to a circus company. “I have no idea of where my family is now,” says Anita, tears in her eyes. She has worked as an entertainer for the past eight years.

Gita Gurung from Butwal has been part of the circus for six years. She was recruited when she was just eight-years-old. Six of her sisters also worked in the circus but left to get married. Now her mother, Kalawat, wants her daughter to marry too. The circus forces the girls to work in both Nepal and India. No one in either country is doing anything to stop them.

Monkey trade

Antapna Puse, 15 February

Animal rights activists are urging the government to withdraw its wildlife farming policy, which allows domesticated breeding and research of certain species like monkeys, snakes, deer and crocodiles. There is concern that the government’s permission to export monkeys will send them to labs in the West where they will die slow and painful deaths. The government has reportedly already allowed the export of thousands of these monkeys to America.

Monkey suppliers are looking at Nepal because other countries have banned exports. Nepali activists have sent 500 letters of protest to the Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) to prevent the export.

In Nepal, monkey researcher Mukesht Chalise has denied allegations of involvement in the controversial deal. But he is said to be working closely with an American research organisation that has been helping to establish a monkey breeding and research centre in both Nepal and Russia. Chalise works with the Natural History Museum of Nepal with which the government has reached an agreement to supply 150 monkeys for breeding purpose.

Researchers can buy a rhesus monkey from DNPWC at a cost of Rs 25,000 for breeding and they can use their second generation for research as per the government policy. It is estimated that 14,000 monkeys are used every year in American research labs for testing vaccines and other drugs. American labs are reportedly ready to pay as much as $10,000 for each monkey.
Investing in universal primary education is one of the best ways for poor nations to boost economic growth, their citizens’ health and other indicators of development, says a new report released by a group of 16 private US development and relief agencies.

The report, ‘Teach a Child, Transform a Nation’, took raw data from the World Bank and other United Nations development agencies and found a high correlation between education and the benchmarks, such as economic growth and health statistics, which determine a country’s development. “Education provides the foundation upon which stable nations are built,” said Stephen Moseley, chair of the Basic Education Coalition (BEC), which includes CARE, International Youth Foundation, Save the Children and Women’s Edge, among other groups.

The report indicates that enrollment in primary schools is increasing around the world, foreign aid from donor countries for boosting enrollment is still not keeping up with demand. Of some 680 million primary-school-age children worldwide, some 115 million—about 60 percent of them girls—are not in school. And one-half of those who are enrolled in primary school today do not finish. More than one-third of primary-school-age students in South Asia and Africa are not attending school, the report said.

The correlation between primary education and economic productivity is quite dramatic, it adds. One year of additional education increases individual output by between four and seven percent, the report found, while a farmer with just four years of basic education was found to be nearly 10 percent more productive than his neighbour with no primary education at all.

Educating girls, in particular, was found to increase per capita income and reduce poverty in all countries. Educated women generally assume more responsibility for household finances and are also seen as more responsible in how they spend money, compared with respect to the health and education of children. The report stresses that education is not by itself sufficient to generate successful development, but that it is important in increasing economic productivity and improving health, as measured by life expectancy and lower infant mortality rates. Educated people are also better able to protect themselves from becoming infected with HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

Women with at least some secondary education were found to be three times more likely to know how HIV is transmitted than women with no education at all. Similarly, poorly educated girls and women were more likely to be caught up in trafficking, the sex trade and child labour. Similarly, countries with higher levels of secondary school enrollment were found to be politically more stable than those with lower levels of education. Higher levels of education appeared to be critical in reducing corruption as well, adds the report.

The BEC was created after the 2000 World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, Senegal, where officials from 164 UN member-states pledged to make primary education truly universal in their countries by 2015. While 83 countries are on schedule to meet that goal, according to the study, 71 nations are falling short, about one-half of them in sub-Saharan Africa, the world’s poorest region. In addition to high rates of HIV/AIDS infection, sub-Saharan Africa suffers from a huge foreign-debt load. International agreements have made some progress in reducing the debt, precisely to provide countries with more resources for health and education, but many development activists say these accords must go much further to ensure that the WEF goal of “education for all” can be achieved.

Developing countries on average spend about $40 per child on primary education, compared with 100 times that amount in the wealthy developed countries of North America, Europe and Asia. When Kenya last year made primary education free—a major step toward the WEF goal—it found some 1.5 million children who had not been attending school flocked to classes. But the system was not prepared for such an influx, and average class size rose from 40 to 120.

According to the report, the experience demonstrated how developing countries needed far more resources for education and that, in the absence of greater debt relief, those resources would have to come from wealthy donors. But it is not only a question of more money to reduce class sizes to manageable levels. The developing world currently has about 26 million primary teachers in their schools, but reaching the WEF target will require that between 15 and 35 million more be deployed, the report says.

Altogether, an extra 5.6 billion dollars will be required to reach the WEF target, according to the UN. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which the United States rejoined this year after a 20-year boycott. That additional funding is roughly equivalent to what Washington currently spends in Iraq and Afghanistan every six weeks. ● (PST)

Reflection and Reality paintings by Erina Tamrakar till 28 February at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat 4428694

Feminine reality

The walls of Gallery Nine are filled with women. Thirty paintings by Erina Tamrakar reflect an alternate reality of the conventional Nepali woman. Erina’s latest work journey further on her portrayal of women as a major subject of expression. Her art shows women in that most dynamic of roles: motherhood. Her subjects are pensive and somewhat aloof, very different from the usual conventional interpretation of the genre. her women play with a newborn baby, contemplate with their swaddled words or are wrapped in their own sense of self. The paintings on display suggest that Erina has worked with open heart and tried to explore many feminine approaches.

The artist’s steady hand and use of colours leap out, these paintings show the artist’s progress in employing hues and textures to create a sparkling energy. The overall impression is of women content in their existences. Equally appealing are paintings which consist of double and triple canvases composed as sequences.

(Mahawon Acharya)
Tashi Ghale and Deepak Acharya chat about what it takes

Golf at 40
Tashi Ghale and Deepak Acharya

One afternoon eight years ago, a chance meeting with Ang Tseting of Thamsukh Trekking and Parikshat Lama from Nepal’s national team, asked me to join them at the Royal Nepal Golf Club (RNGC). They gave me one club and a few balls to hit in the range. And that was the start. I was 40 years old then. I soon found myself hooked.

Why do you work so hard at your golf? Soon after being exposed to golf, I decided to become a member of RNGC and started taking lessons. I became interested in the club tournaments. Being very competitive by nature and since I believe a person cannot be a winner without being disciplined and diligent, I started working hard to win. My game improved and soon I became a single handicap.

How would you evaluate your success? I strongly feel the level of competition is low, and we don’t have many players who can compete in international amateur tournaments. Just because I have been selected to represent Nepal, I can’t participate just for the sake of it, and so I put in the hard work in practicing to reach this level.

How do you balance running a top hotel and finding enough time to practice? It was very difficult in the early days. I had just started the hotel and was more a weekend player. Once I began to represent Nepal I had to manage my time for golf as well. I’m in the office early and stay till noon, then after lunch reach the golf course and I’m back in the office at night. It’s a daily routine for me now.

What does Nepal need to make breakthroughs in this sport? Golf has gained massive popularity, globally and regionally. If some Nepali golfers perform well at international levels, it is automatically inspiring. We can’t just lay back and wait for that to happen. It has to be pushed with integrated support from the golfing community: golf clubs, NGA, Nepal Sports Council (NSC) and the Government of Nepal. It’s said that we have so few talented young amateur players. Deepak, after you and Toran Shahi turned professional, we haven’t seen many similar cases, but surely within a few years we can produce great golfers. We need to unite and form a golf development committee, establish a junior Golf Academy, select young golfers and give them proper training. I see no reason why Nepal cannot grab a gold medal in the Asian games in the near future.

What future do you see for Nepali youngsters? I see a very prosperous one, however I have found that neither the professionals nor top amateurs see it from that angle. We have talented players but none of them are giving their 100 percent. To achieve success one must be fully determined and want it to happen, and not just wish it to happen. Examples are our two top amateurs, CB Bhandari and Shivam Ram Shrestha who come from very different social and economic backgrounds, but neither give their all. Today, even the regional Indian golf Tour has so much money that one can live a comfortable life by playing golf professionally, but people should be ready to work hard at their game.

What are your goals in golf? I have no ambition to become a professional golfer, nor to win a Gold Medal in the Asian Games. I mainly like to support golf development in this country as we have a very high potential. I’m ready to support talented players in my personal capacity, and to be associated in the management of the national golf team, and support them.

What does one need to become a successful player? Good coaching, yiga and fitness, good golf practice facilities and most importantly, the spirit of hard work.

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

It’s not cricket!
If India refuses to play Pakistan, peace may suffer

RAJU DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

A row is building up between India and Pakistan over Nepal’s decision to honour a commitment to send a cricket team over for a tour in March. India has cited security concerns but the real reason could be the fact that the right-wing, ultranationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government expects to find a general election in April and is anxious to avoid anything that might make it look bad. “We cannot risk the safety of our players who will be expected to play on open grounds,” said Deputy Home Minister Swami Chinmayanand when asked if the six-week tour would materialize.

The issue of whether or not India’s cricket 11 will tour Pakistan in March is considered so sensitive that a final decision has been left to Vaipaley himself. Reports from Islamabad suggest that the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) may seek Musharraf’s intervention. The PCB could lose up to $25 million in sponsorship and advertisement and television coverage rights, including $4 million to the Korean electronics giant Samsung that holds the title-sponsored rights.

Officials in the home ministry said earlier in the week that the government favours a postponement of the tour to May, by which time the general elections are expected to be out of the way. To add to the conundrum, Saurav Ganguly, the captain of the Indian side and Sachin Tendulkar, reckoned as one of the world’s best ever batsmen, have both indicated they had apprehensions regarding the tour. On Friday, PCB chairman Najam Khan told Indian news channels from Islamabad that if the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) does call off the tour or postpones it, the matter would be taken up with the International Cricket Council (ICC) — which could then award stiff penalties.

Indications are that if the tour does come through, the Indian team may not include some of the country’s top players. Likewise, the BCCI may insist on not having to play in some of Pakistan’s tough towns like Karachi and Peshawar, but limit the series to the capital Islamabad and Lahore, which are considered safer. India restored sporting ties with Pakistan only three months ago as a sign of improving ties between the two nations. The severe reaction to sportswear promotions at neutral venues where matches were scheduled, such as Singapore, Sharjah and Toronto. Cricket and other sporting matches between the subcontinental rivals inevitably prove to be major crowd pullers because of the extra sizzle. But they are even more frequented when played on each other’s territory. Last year too, a South African team refused to play in Peshawar, which is close to the Afghan frontier, while the New Zealanders called off a tour after a bomb went off in front of their hotel in Karachi in May.

Images

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It has been a while since Hollywood has produced a bona fide action hero, but it appears that one has finally emerged. Look out Vin Diesel, because the Rock appears ready to roll. He is the Schwarzenegger of the 2000s with a comprehensive acumen. In welcome to the jungle, the Rock's director, Peter Berg, has wisely kept computer animations on a short leash. The story is simple: Rock (The Rock), a self-described "Racial Expert", finds himself in Brazil on his latest job. His mission is to locate Trains (Sean William Scott), his boss's son, and bring him to California. Welcome offers everything a good movie of this sort should: It has been a while since Hollywood has
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As we approach another silly season in Nepal, it is an opportune moment for all responsible citizens to be prepared to meet whatever eventuality fate has in store for us in the run-up to the much-awaited Five-Day Bandha.

One of the things we have to get ready for is a nationwide shortage of tyres, the weapon of choice against regression. At the rate that they are being consumed on the streets, our strategic stockpiles of radials and 13-inch radial grip premium tread are now running so low that there is a strong possibility the agitation could come to a grinding halt. National tyre reserves therefore need to be urgently replenished on a war-footing before the next and final phase of the agitation which is just departing from Gate Eight. Otherwise the vanguards of our anti-regression crusade may be forced to make even bigger arsenals of themselves than this scribe has so far made.

The next thing we have to do is gird up our loins for the possibility that the strike by adulterous gas station owners will soon be over because the government will refuse to allow them to keep on breaking the Sixth Commandment, which states, and I quote: “Thou shalt not covet the kerosene in thy neighbour’s petrol.” But seriously, what on earth are we going to do if, god forbid, our petrol stations start selling petrol? What if our cars actually pass their emission tests without having to resort to an under-the-cable application of lubricants? And, finally, won’t the increased concentration of oxygen in Kathmandu’s air be harmful to our uncustomed lungs?

Having witnessed the awesome display of firepower the other day at Tundikhel with that thundering flypast by the Royal Air Force’s entire fleet of seven strategic long-range heavy bombers, there is little doubt that we have, as a nation, put the fear of god on the foreign military attaches and their wives who were invited to the event to take part in the puncture-the-balloon contest. It is a glorious martial tradition in our country to spook resident envoys of potential aggressors on Shivaratri and Nauli and allow them to be shocked and awed by our military might and the ability of our brave commandos to ‘fire at will’ in an orderly and disciplined manner.

It is also accepted practice in international diplomacy to respect the warm feelings that friendly countries harbour toward us, and reciprocate at the earliest possible opportunity. This is why it is heartening to note that our ambassador in London will soon be presenting a note verbal to the authorities there expressing our deep concern about creeping militarisation in the UK, and to remind them that additional Gudsahas will only be provided if they are deployed for non-lethal purposes.

Our envoy in New Delhi has also met Indian officials to give them unshielded advice about our belief that only if India adheres strictly to constitutional norms and rule of law can democracy be strengthened in the world’s largest democracy. And Washington has agreed to Nepal’s demand to allow a team of Nepali human rights activists to monitor the US presidential elections in November, especially in polling districts in Florida to ensure that there is no ballot-tampering and chad-counting irregularities.

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