

NEPALI Times

#184

20 - 26 February 2004

24 pages

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Cute cars

The 3rd NADA Auto Show 2004 is underway at the BICC till 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 Ambassadors to Nepal and promoting them as ideal taxis. The 4th Great Himalayan VW Beetle Rally kicks off on 13 March, with money raised going to cleft palate surgery. Read all about these great cars on p 12-13.



Times nepalTIMES.COM

Weekly Internet Poll # 124

Q. Do you think King Gyanendra overstepped the bounds of a constitutional monarch with the royal address in Nepalganj?

Total votes: 2,130

Weekly Internet Poll # 125. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Do you agree the extradition of two senior Maoists indicates New Delhi's policy shift?

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Democrazy

Kathmandu braces for a springtime of unrest



Government supporters at the statue of King Tribhuban Thursday shouted pro-monarchy slogans. Later in the afternoon, political parties also marked Democracy Day by shouting anti-king slogans.

KIRAN PANDAY

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 Chiluwal 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 banda 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 socket devices in Kabhre, Jhapa and Surkhet.

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

The Maoist campaign of sabotage and assassinations in the capital come as King Gyanendra 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 dens.

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 blunt rebukes against them in the Nepalganj 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 Ratna 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. ●

Editorial p2
What's the point?

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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
 Desk Editors: Trishna Gurung, Jemima Sherpa
 Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Bhushan Shilpakar
 Advertising: Sunaina Shah advertising@himalmedia.com
 Subscription: Anil Karki, subscription@himalmedia.com
 Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Lalitpur
 GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
 Tel: 01-5543333-6, Fax: 01-5521013
 Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 01-5547018



Colombia and Nepal

Countries once famous for coffee and mountains

GUEST COLUMN
Karin Eichelkraut

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 blast a bus in Sindhupalchok. Six passengers are killed, the arm and head of a 14-year-old boy are found 100m away. Children are killed by roadside bombs on their way to school. The Maoist website 'takes credit' for the murder of Ganesh Chiluwal. Take credit for killing a man committed to non-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 mow down everyone inside. And on Wednesday, when there was full-scale conventional warfare in progress in Mudbara with air support and artillery, the rest of the army was on Tundikhel simulating helicopter-borne assault on a mud hut. What were onlookers outside the fence supposed to think?

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 violations. If the military and the guerrillas can't stop fighting, they can at least pledge to fight by the rules. Signing the human rights accord would mean ensuring that innocent Nepalis who do not agree with this slaughter and want no part in it, are not harmed.

The Maoist leadership must now acknowledge that the path of armed struggle they embarked on eight years ago has degenerated into mayhem and violence. All this has achieved in eight years is militarise the country and spread misery. It has strengthened the army, tripled its budget in three years. It's time for the comrades and the generals to ask themselves: what is the point?



GOING FOR THE SPREE, ACRYLIC ON LOKTA PAPER BY KARIN EICHELKRAUT

The errors made and opportunities lost in resolving 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 mountains and gentle people, but 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 Colombia, and 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 when 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 42 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 out. 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 Nepal government is now doing. Successive presidents ruled under a state of emergency for over two decades, giving the military more power and cutting civil liberties. The military budget soared and so did foreign financial aid, 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 resemble the oligarchs. The cash-starved guerrillas started extortion and kidnapping of landowners and their relatives. In order to defend themselves, the landlords created paramilitary groups, which grew into a brutal force during the 1980s involved in 'social cleansing': the elimination of real or suspected drug addicts, ex-convicts, thieves, criminals, prostitutes, homosexuals, beggars and street children. A civil society that shared these interests tolerated the excesses.

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 GULF

I flew from Kathmandu to Abu Dhabi last Saturday night in a much better position than most of my fellow passengers. How many Nepali labourers migrating to the Gulf countries for work lose their dignity before ever leaving Kathmandu? Please, somebody tell 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 wannabe 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 as the frustrated low ranking officials at Kathmandu airport do. It is not necessary for further research into support services for those who migrate overseas for work. There is no need for the production of more overly consulted baseline studies, or yawn-yawn mandate heavy, textually diplomatic, policy positioning. Please, tell me that

there an original, immediate, 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 '8, going on 9' (#183). It seems like a distant memory sitting down for breakfast 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 Maobadi would rejoin the electoral process and Nepalis 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 war completed eight years, never has peace seemed as remote." If there is ever to be 'peace', the 'war' must be seen as not just a 'Maoist war' but also a 'government war'. Both sides have shown the Nepali people and the world that they are willing to fight till the last rupee, the last Nepali. This 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 10'.

Michael van de Veer, Hawaii

MEDIOCRE

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 and standing, exemplified by his stance in the piece you translated ('Bilateral' #183). His role as the mediator 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 since 1990. But has it really benefited our society? There has been a lack of serious discussion about grave topics like education and health. All the private media is doing now is covering superficial and sensational issues 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 blame political parties, the king and the

Maoists for the current state of the country, shouldn't 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 (*swadeshi* or *bideshi*), which has forgotten that it has a public service role. They are not here just to make money and construct big buildings for themselves.

Brajesh Gautam, Kathmandu

SIKKIM

Your editorial ('Seek 'em', #180) was quite fallacious in its context, but you are right that Nepal is not so small that it can just be swallowed up like Sikkim. So, why the fear of Sikkimisation? Let us be not apprehensive on that issue, but let's probe whether India can create other problems for us which would hinder our path to development and prosperity. The problem isn't that Nepalis lack self-esteem, as you argue, but they are sensitive and patriotic. We don't have an inferiority complex. We are proud to be Nepali. We also lack zest and zeal, and to a certain extent we lack morality. So let's inculcate these values so that we never have to worry about Sikkimisation because of the strength of our national unity. At least our dignity and pride is intact, and these will protect our national identity.

Pabitra Poudyal, Bhaktapur

THE KING AND YOU

CK Lal's 'A king can't do wrong' (#181) raised interesting points about the responsibilities of a king towards his 'subjects'. Despite the 'we' this and 'we' that, he couldn't



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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 paramilitaries, 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 the 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.

Under pressure from foreign governments, the fight against the drug mafia has intensified, fuelling more violence. The cartels have splintered into smaller groups that are even more difficult to detect. No amount of aerial herbicide sprayings, no crop alternatives have effectively controlled the lucrative trade. Surprisingly, 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 honesty, committed and accountable. ●

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

A Dhaka spring!

A springtime of political awakening in Bangladesh

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

It is the hartal season, and when that happens you know the two dowager begums of Bangladeshi democracy are at each other's throats again. The difference this time is that Khaleda Zia is the premier, and it is Sheikh Hasina's

STATE OF THE STATE CK Lal



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 hartals, we have bandas. The relationship between Zia's BNP and Hasina's Awami League resembles the ties between Nepali Congress and the UML in the good old days, even though in Kathmandu, political mudslinging has now been replaced by gunfire and bombs.

Given that they had a headstart over us, the Bengalis have developed hartals into a fine art form. Compared to our bandas, their strikes here are civilised. For

instance, a Bangladeshi hartal 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 hartals, Dhaka's one million rickshaw-pullers like their Thamel counterparts, earn enough to pay back their loans. Hartals have now become an important component of the political economy of Bangladesh with its wealth redistribution potential.

The other thing Nepalis share 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 afoot 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 Garmeenland that has attracted foreign dignitaries is too obvious an explanation to convince them. It reminds us of Chandrasekhar's private visits to Kathmandu last month billed as a harbinger of political



MIN BAJRACHARYA

change in Nepal.

There is tyrant lurking in the heart of every South Asian that leaps out the moment it spots a weaker target. Perhaps that explains the impatient and intolerant politics all our leaders. From Sheikh Hasina to General Musharraf, and from President Chandrika to our very own Comrade 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 ISI—identity, 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. ●

make his attitude towards his people any plainer by deciding to lavish money on expensive cars and over-the-top increases in pocket money. At this time! This man has an agenda. Replacing one generic government-type with another ad infinitum will not improve Nepal's lot. So, the students have a point, and if they take the next step by getting focused and prepared to actively participate in the process of running the country instead of limiting themselves to running around in the streets, things will change. Change from within. Who else is there? Education is not exactly taxing, and there are no jobs waiting for them, so they have the energy and time. Students have done this quite effectively even in developed countries, and the desire for change openly expressed by the Nepali student movement is the only breath of fresh air and certainly a step in the right direction.

Claus Schunke, email

● We couldn't agree with more with your sharp and cogent editorial on the people being treated like pawns ('Pawns', #183). Everytime there is a Nepali killed, a family forced to move out of their village, schools forced to close, or people abducted, it is one more instance of the people being made to suffer because of the power struggle at the centre. Why should the people be punished if the political forces can't agree? It has become a part

of our political culture that every time a rival is in power, you force the country down by declaring a banda and make the people suffer just so you can score points. Grow up, you politicians. As you rightly say: "Throughout all this, it is only the people who are showing any sanity or sense of responsibility." This is why the people are not joining the political parties' protests and the student unions, because they don't trust their motives. This is why they are not coming out overwhelmingly in support of the king, because they think he has an authoritarian agenda. And the reason they may have second thoughts about coming out on the streets to protest Maoist atrocities is because Ganesh Chiluwal has shown them what happens to people who disagree with the Maoists. The people don't want to have anything to do any of these so-called rulers who want to reign over their dead bodies, and we would like to think that the reason they stayed home and didn't go to work for two banda days this past week was because they are totally fed up with this sad circus that passes for Nepali politics.

Nila KC and
Laxmi Shrestha, Dhulikhel

CORRECTION

Due to a currency conversion error, the price of two Indian Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) was erroneously stated in '8, going on 9' (#183). The aircraft will cost approximately NRs 500 million apiece.



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Back to zero

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



ENSURE REGISTER SET TO ZERO BEFORE DELIVERY

KIRAN PANDAY

NARESH NEWAR

As 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 mix subsidised kerosene with diesel and petrol. It told gas stations to keep their kerosene depots outside a one 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 feel 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 as and when appropriate." 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 Amlekhgunj depot and there is a large network involved in this crime (Nepali 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 mo-ped 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 simple: don't let the petrol mafia get away this time.

There has been evidence that almost 60 percent of the petrol stations around the country are selling adulterated petrol and this has been going on for years. Following an investigative report by this publication and *Himal Khabarpatika* 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 ever 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 60 percent of gas stations were selling adulterated fuel. For another six months, the Nepali public will be using diluted diesel and petrol and breathing its carcinogenic fumes.

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

Asthma 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 blood and is related to excessive carbon monoxide in the air, again caused by incomplete combustion. Hypoxia leads to fatigue and dizziness and is the cause of numerous traffic accidents.

Valley vehicles 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.

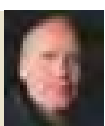
No Nepal

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

Halfway 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 meltdown 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

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



from taxes to Hindu temples in Ayodhya? Not a mention of Nepal anywhere, not even with extraditions of Maoists and pro-rebel rallies organised in Delhi. This is particularly worrisome, 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 loony Left in Bihar. But their concern is momentary and lapses when the talk moves onto local politics, peace with Pakistan, Musharaff's possible role in selling nukes 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 beast 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 junket 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 sip some proper Guinness," remarked one friend who'd been here 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 sit now at sea level in America and listen to the world's loudest media cacophony. 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 its fate. But it's all rather sad. ●



At the rate of vehicle growth, the situation must be much worse now. In monetary terms, this impact causes the loss of approximately Rs 200,000,000 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. ●

How it’s done

The Indian modus operandi works in Nepal too



- Tankers trundle out of the gate.
- Stop. People openly pilfer fuels from these tankers in small cans.
- Pilfered 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!
- 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>)

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 example of things to come, the group gives the example of the village of Sudama where locals have been armed. On 4 Feburary, 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 Chiluwal, 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 beat cricket powerhouse South Africa in the U-19 World Cup Cricket on Wednesday in Bangladesh, boosting its chances to rise up the rankings.

The Nepali team took on Uganda in Group B Thursday, and a win may vault the team into the Super League. The Nepali 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,” Binaya 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.

THE LEADER IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

UNFPA is the world's foremost international provider of development funding for population and reproductive health programmes. Since we began operations in 1969 we have provided more than \$ 6 billion in assistance to developing countries. In order to maintain the Fund's position at the cutting edge of development assistance in the field of population and reproductive health, we are continuously striving to enhance our programmatic and managerial capacities. We are seeking outstandingly qualified applicants for several Country Support Team (CST) vacancies at the level of technical adviser (L5*).

The CST offices are located in Africa: Addis Ababa, Dakar, Harare; Asia/Pacific: Bangkok, Suva, Kathmandu; Arab States/Europe: Bratislava, Amman; and Latin America/Caribbean: Mexico City. CST Technical Advisers work closely with UNFPA programme managers, government counterparts and officials from other UN agencies, NGOs and bilateral organizations to promote the achievement of UNFPA's mandate in the fields of reproductive health and population.

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The main competencies required are a capacity for:

- Conceptual innovation / strategic thinking;
- Adaptation and application of knowledge/innovations in different contexts;
- Communication and Advocacy;
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Foreign aid or first aid?

How to spend money when a war is going on



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

DHRUBA BASNET

KHADGA SINGH

Nearly half of the development projects in the country are either grinding to a halt or have been suspended. The money meant 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 disburse 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 disbursement."

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 Wenk of the European Commission delegation in Kathmandu. "That 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

changed 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 be suspicious, 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 areas."

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 World Food 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 sidelining 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 revise 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 Nepal's biggest 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 been 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 water supply system should have been the priority.

The Asian Development Bank, Japan, Norway and Sweden are among those supporting the project. With MWSP in limbo, the government is now shifting its attention to the Kathmandu Valley Water Optimisation

Program. Based on a Japan Bank of International Cooperation report, the focus has shifted to reforms in the water supply system within Kathmandu. "Under this plan, we will make new reservoirs, correct the pipe network and other reforms," says MWSP Executive Director Dhruba Bahadur Shrestha. "For that, we will cut down the number of reservoirs to be built outside Kathmandu for the Melamchi project." Kathmandu loses more than 40 percent of its water due to an outdated and faulty water pipe system.



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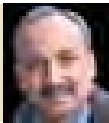
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Balancing rights and wrongs

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

The Supreme Court's angry instruction finally worked: the army headquarter has started receiving habeus 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

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



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 Taskforce' took the life of Ganesh Chiluwal, president of the Maoist Victims' Association in the heart of the capital on Sunday, a day after his association burnt effigies of

Prachanda and Baburam, 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.

Chiluwal'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 doubts 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



54-year-old Shekhadi Datta Chiluwal grieves before his son's cremation on Monday.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

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 Keshab Prasad Upadhyay during his official trip to Surkhet—all have 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. Chiluwal's murder may not fall into the above category, but is far more condemnable. 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? ●

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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 Sunita in a school essay. She knelt hunched over a kerosene lamp, on a *gundri* mat. It was a warm balmy night in Lamjung.

So, Himalayan countries like Nepal and others are not the only Shangri-Las —England is a Shangri-La too. When asked, the majority of Nepalis here will remember the London of their pre-migration imagination as a sophisticated 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 confounded and confirmed. Yes, here are the tall buildings, but they are just one aspect of a much bigger picture. There are clean streets, but they have sanitised, de-individualised houses holding over-individualistic people and around the corner are “filthy” streets that “smell like meat”. There are organised lives: suited chic Londoners eating Prêt-a-Mangé lunches. But they stride blindly past huddled junkies lying sunken into spirals of chemical highs and pavement lows.

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 importance”.

Going ‘home’ to Nepal brings with it the clash of the Shangri-La and the lived London experience. It brings identity crisis. In the words of Shohidur Rahman in the *Guardian Weekend*, “Londoners come wrapped in 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 pumpkin is never out of season, where students have laptops and where there are poor people and children who are overweight? This is a workable 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 Nepali home lengthen.

On the other hand, determined to be as inconspicuous as possible, people might find themselves speaking little of London, temporarily trying to eclipse a more recently acquired self with an original Nepali self. One interviewee commented, “why should my family worry about my time living abroad, let them have their dream”. But simultaneously an urge to challenge the idealisation of London may also be pressing: a returned daughter will tell her mother to allow British visitors to help make momos, while a brother says he believes that development is not “about getting to choose between a range of cars”. In addition, a feeling of protectiveness towards Nepal can also weave into this picture but it sits uncomfortably with despair, frustration and embarrassment at the country’s political situation. All these various impulses together form a charged 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 to either be mutually exclusive (as does the Nepali embassy) or else they expect them to be two separate coexisting identities. More than coexistent they are actually merged, one with the other. One’s Britishness can be a Nepali Britishness and vice-versa. In London people can often feel extra Nepali or isolated from Britishness, while back home Britishness can show up starkly against a Nepali background.

The confusion caused by these expectations of mono-identity is partly what causes the erosion of London-the-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 Sunita’s of a heavenly England, explode into fragments. ●

LONDON EYE
Fay Adams



Double loading

MUDITA 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 depositions 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 botched abortion.

Awasthi and two nurses from the clinic were sued by Maya’s brother and were detained, but are now out 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 abortion.

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 Shakya 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 Patan known for secretly performing abortions. The doctor told her that ultrasound sex-selection was unreliable, but said he could perform a DNA test to find out. When we spoke to her, Sabina was unaware 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 the fear of criminal sanction. And because they can afford it, they get discrete and safe medical attention. Poorer mothers, burdened by previous girl



A mother walks through Kathmandu streets carrying a load on her back, as well as her baby.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Now that there is a law for safe abortion, maybe Nepali mothers will not have to suffer and die needlessly

children or husbands who force them to have unsafe abortions do not have a 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,” says 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 admits, sex preference for boys is more difficult to change and can only happen with a transformation in societal values.

Sapana Pradhan Malla 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 Malla.

But such behaviour change will take time. What can be done till then? For now, activists like Malla 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 Nepali citizenship,” Malla says.

Maili Magar was 14 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, Maili is optimistic about her future.

“Imprisoned women have suffered injustice and need help to get back into society,” says Sambhu Jung Rana at the centre. Despite her suffering, Maili 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, Nepali society also has to change and treat its women better. ●

Some of the names of the women in this article have been changed.

BIZ NEWS

NADA auto show

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 Bikash Chettri, chief executive of Global Exposition and Management Services (GEMS) and organiser of the event for the third time since it started in 1998. The five-day show, which started on 18 February, includes both national and international participants displaying both new and old models of four and two wheelers. On display are also vintage and classic cars. The show, also participated by Standard Chartered Bank, Nabil Bank and Union Finance, includes seminars hosted by international auto experts. It’s also a chance for the banks to promote their car loans. “We are confident this show will help promote the automobile industry and market its services,” says Chettri. GEMS also organises books exhibits, exteriors and interiors and lifestyle products in Nepal.



More flights to Bangkok

Nepal and Thailand on Monday signed a long-awaited Air Services Agreement that will allow airlines from both countries to operate up to 22 flights a week from the current 7. At present, only specified airlines from both countries can operate with a limit on number of passengers. “There is now a ray of hope to not just meet the demand of tourists but also enhance the growth of the industry,” said the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) in an ecstatic press release. Thai Airways International brought 40,000 tourists to Nepal in 2002, nearly 20 percent of the total. NTB is currently holding a tourism promo in Thailand and says the agreement will promote Bangkok as Kathmandu’s tourism ‘gateway’.



Bigger Qatar

Qatar Airways is taking delivery of 13 new Airbus aircraft in 2004, boosting its fleet to 38 by the end of the year, as it continues to build a fleet of 52 aircraft during the next five years. Qatar Airways’ Chief Executive Officer Mr. Akbar Al Baker, addressing a press conference in Amman confirmed that this year’s delivery of aircraft represented the airline’s biggest. “This sort of growth is virtually unheard of in the airline industry, and proves once again that we are one of the fastest growing airlines in the world,” Al Baker said. The fleet includes four new A330s, two A320s, and two A321s. In addition, Qatar is also leasing four A330s, bringing our fleet of A330s up to a total of thirteen Airbus A330s by the end of 2004. Qatar Airways links Kathmandu to Doha and Kuala Lumpur 14 times a week with onward connections.

The politics of business outsourcing

Several years ago in Delhi, I called a pest control firm to treat my apartment for termites. A South Indian gentleman with a pleasing smile arrived with canisters of chemicals and a large syringe. He went about his task meticulously. Each time he sprayed, a mist settled on everything. I asked whether this would really work. Breaking into a comforting grin, he said: “Sir, have no worry whatsoever. This is very strong stuff. It is totally banned in

COMMENT

Kaushik Basu

the room, as he reared the syringe to administer another dose. Recently, I gave a lecture in Helsinki on global labour standards. As my talk concluded, I got into an animated debate with my audience. A globalised world, with one country’s goods, capital and pollution flowing into another, will inevitably need common norms and laws. But as my pest-control agent’s answer illustrated, one man’s poison can be another’s assurance. Common standards in a world as inequitable as ours will raise many contentious issues.

The impact of business process outsourcing (BPO) on many developing nations’ labour markets is a case in point. With technological breakthroughs in electronic 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 work to India. Taking all costs into account, a call center in Kansas City costs more than three times as much as one in Mumbai. Not surprisingly, employment has boomed in India’s IT-enabled offshore services sector, soaring 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. Motorola has been laying off workers in the US and moving operations to Brazil, China and its plant in Chihuahua, Mexico. Poor nations look to these facts and trends with hope, while many industrialised countries view them with anxiety. One audience member in Helsinki told me despondently that he had soured on globalisation after some of his friends lost their jobs through no fault of their own, but merely because Ericsson decided to move 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 nativism and populism. On the Ku Klux Klan’s Web sites, economics now vies 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

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



nations. When a corporation outsources operations to a developing country, some of its incumbent workers really do lose out (at least in the short run). Of course, many other groups gain. Workers in the host country, such as software technicians and call-center operators, clearly benefit 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 moved to developing countries. 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, industrialized nations—and their workers—would be worse off in absolute terms. ● (© Project Syndicate)

Kaushik Basu is Professor of Economics and Director, Program on Comparative Economic Development, at Cornell University.

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 enters Nepal from India, there is systematic adulteration every step of the way: along the side of the highway to the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) depot at

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

Amlekhgunj, in the distribution network from Amlekhgunj 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. Krishna 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 partial and led-by-Harendra-Bahadur-Shrestha-forever Nepal Consumers’ Forum (NCF).

In fact, judging from the then lassitude of so-called consumer rights advocates, the news that our government officials along with their political masters were in bed with petroleum dealers to sell diluted petrol to unsuspecting consumers was just another boringly predictable story on corruption. Or so it seemed, until this week. Suddenly, the story got interesting. Madan Raj Sharma, the immediate past general manager of NOC, is now in jail—arrested on graft

charges. On its own, his arrest symbolised the corruption in NOC. The government sent out letters 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 owners (ie, another cartel)—has hit back by instructing its members to shut down all depots for now.

The result is that despite NOC’s assurance that there 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. NCF, despite its high-sounding name, rarely undertakes any proactive work and preemptive investigations on behalf of consumers it purports to represent. Looking at which way political winds are blowing, it is reduced to merely hogging the media with predictably safe comments too late and too little, that too, only after issues have come to a boiling point. In this case too, its prolonged silence in the face of the December 2000 media investigation should tell most sensible Nepalis that this organisation lacks credibility when it comes to really pushing for consumer rights *at all times*.



It’s also an open secret that government officials were in cahoots with NPDA members. But the government abruptly changed its tune. It’s like when one thief suddenly changes profession to be a police officer, the other is angry. This is what happened here. Pampered NPDA is sulking 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 is 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 grease palms to buy more time, 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. ●



JULIO GODOY in PARIS

Lack of political will at power centres is emerging as the major obstacle to meet international goals set by the United Nations to halve poverty by 2015.

Called the ‘millennium development goals’ these targets have been accepted by developing countries, including Nepal. But development experts say weak governance and leadership are hindering chances that the goals will be met.

“Every year the most powerful nations of the world spend over \$1,000 billion in weapons, \$350 billion in subsidies for agriculture, but only \$57 billion in development aid,” World Bank president James

Wolfensohn told the fifth annual conference of the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank in Paris this week, which was attended by representatives from 80 countries to explore initiatives to meet the millennium goals.

“At this pace we are not going to meet the millennium goals by the year 2015,” Wolfensohn warned. The eight goals were established at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2000. With 2015 as target date, the goals aim to halve the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day and the

number of hungry people.

Universal primary education, promotion of gender equality, reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development are other goals.

It now seems the goals will never be met given current levels of aid. “If present trends continue, there will be 10 million child deaths in 2015, compared to half that if the target is met,” the British charity, Oxfam, said in a report late last year.

Turning tanks into tractors

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 Luis Inacio 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 overcome this inequality.”

Lula called for a special tax on weapons sales to create and international fund to pay for development. “It would generate 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 manifesto for the 21st century is to set social and environmental priorities, and to fulfil the moral obligations 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 these opportunities away with the other.” ● (IPS)

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EU gets stingy

BRUSSELS— 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.

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 has 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 Eurostep, 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. (IPS)

Dutch deportations

The Dutch rightwing parliament on Tuesday gave the green light to deport some 26,000 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 ruling party. One man who will be deported sewed up his mouth in protest.

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-immigration 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. (IPS)



JILL GOCHER

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 Himalaya 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 documentists like Jill Gocher come in, many times, to remind us of what is precious in our

Nomad’s land

Jill Gocher portrays the hardy Khampa of eastern Tibet

own societies. The Khampa are Tibet’s “cowboys”: exuberant, hard-working, family-oriented, and devoutly Buddhist. The historic kingdom of Kham 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 Khampas 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



KIRAN PANDAY

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 sepia: 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. ●

Khampa—Portraits of Eastern Tibet by Jill Gocher From 20 February 16, 2004 Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048



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Ladies and Gentlemen, the Beetles

Get your carburettors cleaned for the next big Bug rally



The 4th Great Himalayan VW Beetle Rally gets set to hit the road again this year when a swarm of Beetles of all ages roar off from Patan Darbar Square to Dhulikhel on 13 March.

The small population of Nepali Beetles is going strong, many of them blithely overtaking Japanese sedans 30 years their junior on the Lazimpat uphill with that distinctive growl from their hind-quarters. Blame it on rampant consumerism and the age of use-and-throw, but many of us simply don't see how or why anyone would want to drive what is, quite frankly, an antique.

However, two decades after production stopped in its native Germany, the cult of the Beetle is alive and kicking in Nepal. Once again Beetle fans are planning to head out en masse to show off their machines and also raise money for a cleft palate surgery charity.

The moving force behind the charity and rally are New Zealander Susan Fowlds and paediatric surgeon Narayan 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 surgeons that Beetle owners will trust with 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

from Patan Durbar Square to Dhulikhel in their stride. The maintenance vans and tow trucks on last year's rally proved largely unnecessary.

Internationally there has been some bad news for Beetle enthusiasts, the last VW plant in Mexico ceased production in July 2003. More than 21 million cars have been sold since the car's launch in 1939. Although parts from India are still available, the authentic Beetle parts that were still being produced in South America are becoming rarer.

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 repairing old parts, modifying and cannibalising organs from junked models. ●

(Jemima Sherpa)

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Her Excellency, the Ambassador

Why I care so much about the car nobody likes



MIN BAJRACHARYA

AUTO MATIC
Mark Tully

I care about the Ambassador because I do not like losing old friends, especially ones which bring back memories of better times. With her friendly pug-nosed face, headlights resembling the eyes of Thomas The Tank Engine, aero-dynamically-unfriendly rounded roof and unfashionable high gait, she recalls the gallant days of motoring when drivers never knew whether they would reach their destination without a breakdown.

The Ambassador is the steam engine of the Indian road, a challenge to drive and requiring much maintenance. Like a steam engine, she too has a long working

life—you do not trade in an Ambassador. Until the courts stepped in with emission standards, the average age of the Ambassador taxis on the rank outside my house in Delhi must have been at least 20. But longevity isn't her only selling point. The Ambassador is rugged. A recent advertisement admitted that modern cars scored on miles to the gallon, miles per hour but the Ambassador won hands down on potholes to the mile.

She has advantages for the taxi driver who charges on a per capita basis and of course for the joint family. No one knows what the exact record for an Ambassador's load is: the claims go as high as 30 passengers. I have counted 20 in the remoter parts of India, east of Varanasi.

Potholes, unmarked speed-

breakers, bullock cart drivers for whom left and right have no meaning, lorry drivers who claim

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 she has dominated the Indian roads, there has grown up an efficient and cheap vehicle recovery system. Almost every village on a main road has its *mistri* or mechanic, who knows the Ambassador like the back of his greased 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.

Nepali ambassadors

For the Ambassadors' detractors who thought they had seen the last of the dinosaurs, wait! Hindustan Motors is poised to make a comeback to Nepal with new, improved versions of the Ambassador: the Nova Classic and the Grand.

The cars may look like something out of a timewarp for the uninitiated, but for those familiar with this silhouette from their childhood days traveling through India, there is some brand loyalty. However, the Ambassador's dealers in Nepal, Cube International, is not resting on nostalgia alone to sell the product. "The reason this car has staying power despite all the new competition is because it is great value, it is sturdy and it is economical," says Cube's Pragyan Rana.

The Nova Classic comes with an LPG engine and is ideally suited for a taxi, and the first unit was sold in Kathmandu this month. Cube estimates that with the Supreme Court's deadline of two years on replacement of taxis more than 20 years old in



Kathmandu, Pokhara and Bhairawa running out this month, there is a market for more than 700 new taxis. The Nova Classic is an affordable Rs 950,000 and gives 12km/l for diesel and 10 km/l for petrol on a 2 litre engine, which compares favourably with a 800cc Maruti.

The Ambassador Grand is more luxurious and can cost up to Rs 1,350,000 with power steering and air-conditioner. "If you see it as a luxury vintage car that won't put a hole in your pocket and as an economical car, then it's a great buy," Rana says whose company also sells jeeps and vans.

Lau ayo motor Sherpa yo!



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 these are 100 percent homegrown vehicles put together by Hulas Motors of Biratnagar.

"We take pride in our Sherpa," says executive director, Surendra Golchha.

"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 gearbox are Chinese.

The original model Sherpa 46 (D) 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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KIRAN SHRESTHA

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 those four words.

The popularity of the song was helped by the documentary *Bheda ko oon jasto... in 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.

Songs in sheep's clothing

Woolgathering and rediscovering *Bheda ko oon jasto*.

It starred, 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 *goths* 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 Bhattarai'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—of one tune abound. 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 Bhattarai is known for his folk songs and his version launches straight into the original song with backups going



Narayan Wagle and Amrit Gurung looking for the song in a Langtang forest (left) and Gurung jiving with a Syabru musician.

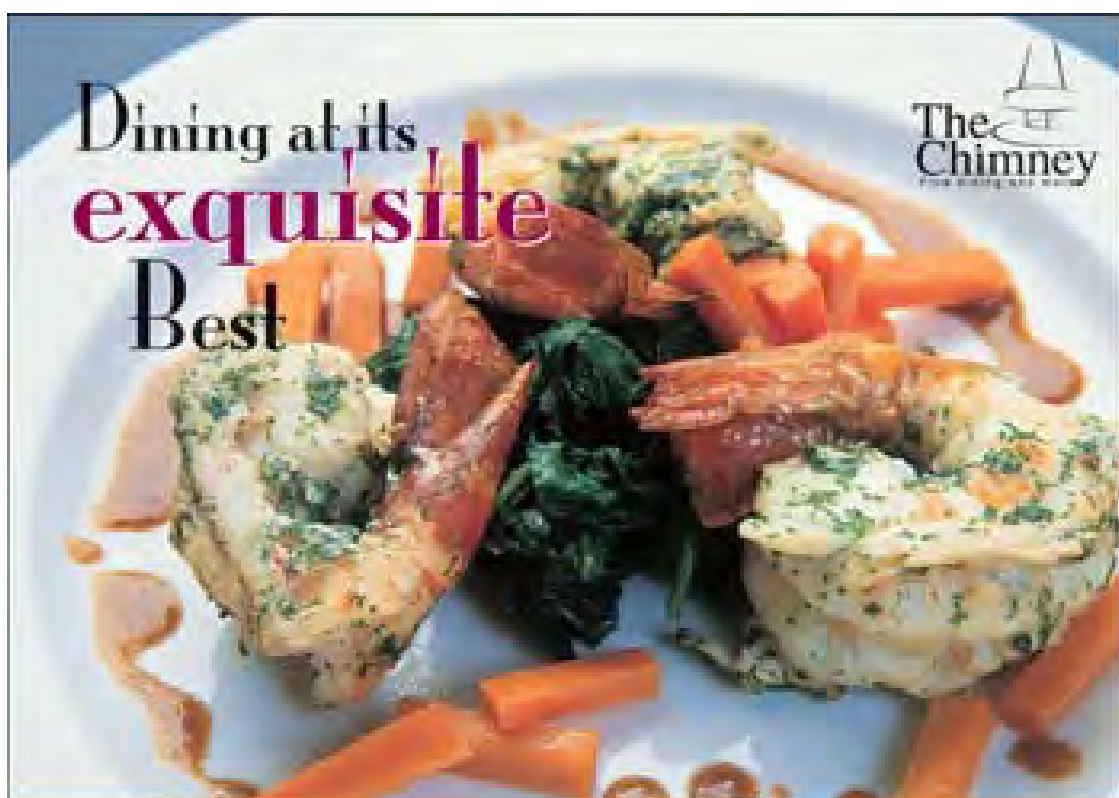
shakachuk and an overt synth presence. The occasional whoop of "Ya hai!" and the ubiquitous flute interval is perhaps an attempt to maintain folk credibility. But Bhattarai's sound is pseudo-folk, if there is such a genre: the folk song has undergone a pop metamorphosis to take on urban sensibilities 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 Bhattarai picked pop, Nepathya relied on rock overtones for a more contemporary feel. The "*shakachuk*" is replaced by "*shikshik*"—a sound viewers will recall from the documentary, and the synthesiser is replaced by guitar riffs and drums. Nepathya rejects the lilt for punchy energy that is reflected in the way lead vocalist Amrit 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 to all Nepalis. And we are grateful for whatever way our music thrives. "*Lok geer* belongs to the people, so it's unfair to call into question artistic interpretations," says Deepesh Shrestha, program director at Hits FM 91.2. "However, I will say that I prefer Bhattarai'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 *pan*."

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. ●



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One song

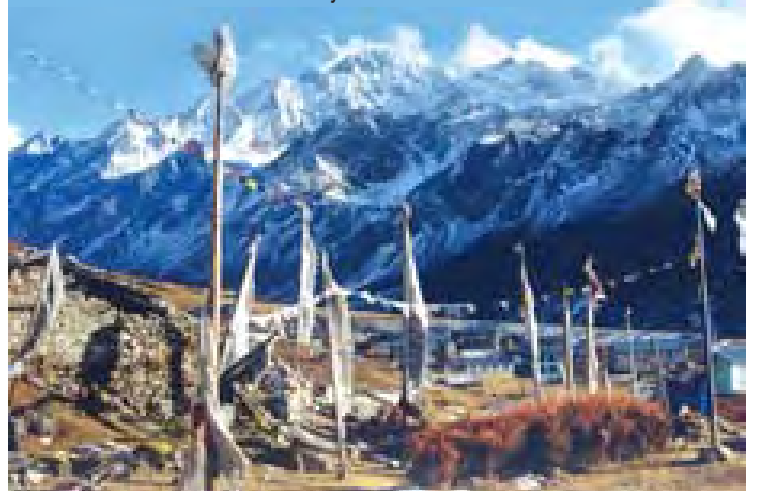
SRADDHA BASNYAT in LANGTANG

About half way between Lama 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 Bhattarai, so we decided to test both songs to see which one he liked.

He listened intently on the earphones to Bhattarai's version and repeated the line likening the sweet taste of Kanchi's cheek to the apples of Syabru. He seemed more distracted during Nepathya's version and later confessed: "I like Bhattarai's one better. It's more like the original."

Kaisang then goes back to his kitchen chores, launching into his own version: "*Bheda ko oon jasto*."



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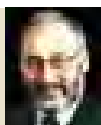
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Deconstructing Iraq



COMMENT

Joseph Stiglitz



With one exception—the actual military “victory”, which looks increasingly Pyrrhic—President Bush’s Iraqi adventure has been marked by repeated failures. Scant signs of weapons of mass destruction have been found and, according to David Kay, America’s chief arms inspector, the stockpiles either never existed or were destroyed years ago. So Bush simply ignored the data, gathered by Hans Blix’s UN inspectors, and the evidence on which he based his case for war seems to have been largely fabricated.

Worse still, it is now clear that Bush never had a plan for when the war ended. Instead of moving towards peace and democracy, the situation in Iraq remains so dangerous that Paul Bremer, the American occupation leader, is using instability as his rationale for avoiding democratic elections this year. Of course, America tried to keep real order in some places, revealing a lot about what it truly valued in Iraq.

When Baghdad fell, the oil ministry was quickly protected, while museums and hospitals were allowed to be looted. If there was not outright corruption in the \$7 billion in contracts awarded to Halliburton, whose former chairman was Vice President Dick Cheney, there was undoubtedly a strong whiff of crony capitalism. Halliburton and its subsidiaries have been ensnared in charges of war profiteering ever since and have had to pay back millions of dollars to the US government.

Now, everyone agrees, the

most important task—beyond creating a democratic state and restoring security—is reconstructing the economy. Blinded by ideology, however, the Bush administration seems determined to continue its record of dismal failures by ignoring past experience. When the Berlin Wall fell, the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union began transitions to a market economy, with heated debates over how this should be accomplished. One choice was shock therapy—quick privatisation of state-owned assets and abrupt liberalisation of trade, prices and capital flows—while the other was gradual market liberalisation to allow for the rule of law to be established at the same time.

Today, there is a broad consensus that shock therapy, at least at the level of microeconomic reforms, failed, and that countries (Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) that took the gradualist approach to privatisation and the reconstruction of institutional infrastructure managed their transitions far better than those that tried to leapfrog into a *laissez-faire* economy. Shock-therapy countries saw incomes plunge and poverty soar. Social indicators, such as life expectancy, mirrored the dismal GDP numbers.

More than a decade after the beginning of the transition, many post-communist countries have not even returned to pre-transition income levels. Worse, the prognosis for establishing a stable democracy and the rule of law in most shock-therapy countries looks bleak. This record suggests that one should think

twice before trying shock therapy again. But the Bush administration, backed by a few handpicked Iraqis, is pushing Iraq towards an even more radical form of shock therapy than was pursued in the former Soviet world. Indeed, shock therapy’s advocates argue that its failures were due not to excessive speed—too much shock and not enough therapy—but to insufficient shock. So Iraqis better prepare for an even more brutal dose.

There are, of course, similarities and differences between the former communist countries and Iraq. In both cases, economies were pervasively weakened before they collapsed. But the Gulf War and sanctions weakened Iraq’s economy much more than communism weakened the USSR’s. Moreover, while both Russia and Iraq are heavily dependent on natural resources, Russia at least possessed demonstrated abilities in some other areas. Russia had a highly educated labor force, with advanced technological capabilities; Iraq is a developing country.

To be sure, Russians went decades without opportunities to exercise entrepreneurship, while Ba’athist rule did not suppress Iraq’s merchant class and entrepreneurial spirit in any comparable way. But Iraq’s location puts it at a distinct disadvantage compared to Russia and many post-communist states: none of Iraq’s neighbors is doing particularly well economically, while many post-communist countries sat next door to the European Union during the 90s boom. Most importantly, ongoing instability in the Middle East will deter foreign investment (other than in the oil sector).

These factors, together with the ongoing occupation, make quick privatisation particularly problematic. The low prices that the privatised assets are likely to fetch will create the sense of an illegitimate sell-off foisted on the country by the occupiers and their

collaborators. Without legitimacy, any purchaser will worry about the security of his property rights, which will contribute to even lower prices. Furthermore, those buying privatised assets may then be reluctant to invest in them; instead, as happened elsewhere, their efforts may be directed more at asset stripping than at wealth creation.

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 causes, 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, prosperous and democratic Middle East. But America’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos.

● (© Project Syndicate)

Joseph E Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics at Columbia University and author of *The Roaring Nineties: A New History of the World’s Most Prosperous Decade*.

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,” reads the billboard. Similar ads can also be seen in Diu and Daman, the other two cities in western India, that along with Goa formed the Portuguese State of India (PSI) until late 1961. Indian citizens entitled to Portuguese nationality because they or their forebears were born in the PSI before Portugal pulled out, frequently apply for passports to sell for a paltry sum to organised crime rings.

The mafia then sell them at a high price not only to people from other parts of India but also to citizens of neighbouring countries who are physically similar to Indians, like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The process of applying for a passport costs nearly \$700. The crime rings then sell the documents for between \$1,240-1,860, according to information disseminated early this month by Goan-born Portuguese parliamentary deputy Narana Coissoró.

The secretary of state of the Portuguese community, José Cesario, spied billboards on his way to Goa during a visit to the former enclaves in India late last year. But despite the efforts by Portugal’s judicial police and by the Civil Registry, where 11,221 passport applications are under investigation, Portuguese authorities admit that the racket continues. Cesario said it has become a lucrative business for crime rings that specialise in forgeries and in trafficking immigrants to the EU, of which Portugal is a member. Among the bearers of adulterated Portuguese passports are alleged Indian terrorists Abu Salem and Masood Azad, who were captured in Lisbon in 2002. Neither had any family relations in the former PSI. (IPS)



America’s economic program for reconstructing Iraq is laying the foundations for poverty and chaos



MUDDASSIR RIZVI in ISLAMABAD

India's and Pakistan's governments are still flirting with each other at the diplomatic level, but their film industries are already falling in love—signing up artists from the country otherwise demonised 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 months.

Despite an official ban on Indian movies in Pakistan they are freely available here on video and CDs. The government has restricted its 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 Ayesha 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 filmmaker 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

Real peace to reel peace

The film industries of India and Pakistan are falling in love

beginning of an era of new politics between Pakistan and India that seek to establish perpetual peace," comments Amir Wasim, 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 blockades.

"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 peace?" 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, Resham, and well-known Pakistani pop-mystic poetry singer, Razaqat Ali Khan, are close to signing contracts, while many others are in waiting.

Similarly, Meera has contracted famous Indian choreographer Saroj Khan to direct dance sequences in one of the movies she is producing in Pakistan. Indian actress-turned-director Pooja Bhat, who visited Pakistan in December 2003, is ready to direct a Pakistani movie. Pakistan's most popular band, Junoon, has already composed a



Pakistan's highest-paid actress, Meera (left), will act in a Bollywood thriller, while Pooja Bhatt (above) will direct a Pakistani movie.

song for Pooja's debut movie, screened in the Pakistani city of Karachi during the Kara Film festival in December.

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

● (IPS)

V-Day in China

Valentine's Day: Yes, Vagina Monologues: No

ANTOANETA BEZLOVA in BEIJING

Once puritanically critical of all occasions that paraded love, communist China has embraced the celebrations of Valentine's Day as a succession of consumer opportunities coated in romance.

Valentine's Day in China this year meant vogue. It means red roses and heart-shaped chocolates, fat Cupids and a commercial victory for fashion brand names, whose signature bags hang proudly on the arms of many couples.

Valentine's Day means anything but vagina. Even after acquiescing to blatant public displays of sentiments of love last weekend, China continues to shun the word 'vagina'.

A pioneering performance of the internationally-acclaimed play 'The Vagina Monologues' was banned in Beijing on Valentine's Day—a week after its staging was cancelled in Shanghai. "We were told we haven't obtained permission from the cultural authorities," says Angel An, one of the curators of the private Today Art Gallery, which was to host the show.

The producers of Eve Ensler's controversial play have tried to minimize the sensation caused by its debut in China by pledging all profits from the show to a Chinese group that works with domestic violence. Yet the commendable



goal has not spared the play the axe.

After having sold most of the 500 tickets for this single show in the capital, producers had to call it off. Proceeds of up to \$30,000 were lost for the organisers and chief among the losers is the Network for Combating Domestic Violence of the China Law Society.

"I'm not surprised by the ban," says Hong Ying, a female writer whose own novels have raised controversy in the past. "It is the name of the play that counts. 'Vagina Monologues' sounds so scary to Chinese officials. What could a

vagina say, they think, and fear that a name like this would attract far too much attention. Attention means discussions, means gatherings, in one word it means trouble."

Vagina in Chinese translates as the "road to Yin" where 'Yin' symbolises the feminine side of nature as opposed to Yang, the masculine side. While the juxtaposition of Yin and Yang is one of the essential principles of Chinese philosophy, the dissection and flaunting of female sexuality is still regarded as a cultural phenomenon imported from the West.

In Shanghai, the play was cancelled because "the authorities said it doesn't suit China's national situation". However, the play has already generated a lot of buzz in the Internet chatrooms—testimony to quite the opposite: the presence of interest and divergent opinions on the subject of openly discussing female sexuality.

Eve Ensler's play created a wave of cultural shocks when first in 1996, it tried to examine publicly touchy subjects like orgasm, menopause, sexual abuse, rape and lesbian experiences. Based on interviews with 200 women from different walks of life—including prostitutes and women raped in war—the play has grown into an international movement used to fight violence against women and given birth to a 'V-day'.

The play has been translated into 25 languages and staged in over 40 countries, including the Chinese-speaking Singapore and Hong Kong.

Had Chinese cultural gurus declared that 'The Vagina Monologues' is too loaded with gruesome stories of war rapes and unsuitable for a romantic festival as Valentine's Day, the cancellation of the show would have hardly generated such fervent anticipation. ● (IPS)

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“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 Chiluwal 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 Chiluwal 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 Chiluwal 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 unreliable and opportunistic. By killing those who don’t agree with them, the Maoists are pushing the country down a spiral of violence.

Rajdhani, 17 February

By killing Ganesh Chiluwal, the Maoists have gagged 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.

This is a double standard.

Chiluwal’s murder forces us to doubt the Maoists’ commitment to multiparty democracy. The message is quite clear: the word democracy doesn’t exist in the Maoist lexicon.

Samacharpatra, 17 February

After one more murder by the Maoist rebels, people have begun to ask: Is this what the ‘people’s war’ is all about? Nepalis are about curious what kind of political system the rebels want to establish by killing citizens who have committed no crime. Chiluwal’s murder has proved that no one is safe in this country. It has also given us a preview of the kind of government they will set up, and the kind of freedom we the people will have if the rebels capture state power.

“I want to give it another try”

Narayan Singh Pun in Drishtii, 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 try 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 can’t 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 94 Maoists in the central committee and 15 in the politburo. That is perhaps why the government played down the handing 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. In politics everything is possible. We have neither opposed Surya Bahadur Thapa nor have 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.



RABI MANANDHAR/DRISHTI

Kingspeak

Gopal Khanal in Kantipur, 16 February

Last year, when the king addressed people in Biratnagar, he asked all sides not to be bogged down in petty politics and stand united. One year later, the king is going all out to blame the political parties. In the Nepalganj address, the king went to unprecedented lengths to express his dissatisfaction with the parties. The changing kingspeak: **Biratnagar address:** The monarchy is for democracy, democracy is for national development, and the monarchy and democracy are both for Nepal’s development...through a free market economy and corruption-free system. **Dhangadi address:** Nationalism is the meeting point...pluralism and free competition are prerequisites, and the international community has started believing us.

Nepalganj address: 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 Sunsari 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 Chaurasia. “If we let her go, there could be other incidents of elephant murders.” Khama Bahadur Dahal, another farmer in Sunsari, 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 herds 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

RPP spokesperson Roshan Karki in Rajdhani, 16 February

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

Speed it up!
Paper on hand: Roadmap

Rajdhani, 15 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“No one is going to believe the king just because he says he speaks for the country and the people.”

– CPN (UML) General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal in Nepal Samacharpatra, 11 February

parties have expressed similar concerns for the betterment of Nepalis and for the future of democracy. This proves the two sides can come to a meeting point, just like the king said in his speech. The king pointed out issues like corruption as hindrances to good governance, constructive training for youths and a development roadmap for the western region. He said politics inspired by the people, devoted to and based on the people, is the only way to make multiparty democracy a success. His thoughts can be the guideline and motivation for all of us. After all, there is nothing more important than the people's welfare. The king said as much in his speech and this is the same philosophy that the leaders of the political parties have stressed repeatedly."

Life is a circus

Samacharpatra, 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 uni-cycle 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 Makwanpur 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 Kamesh Shaha from Hetauda.

Anita Chapagain, 18, from Hetauda says she was "supplied" by her parents to an agent and then taken to India via Birganj 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, Kalawati, 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

Annapurna Post, 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 rhesus 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 Mukesh 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.

Junketeers

Kantipur, 14 February

जंकटोर


Senior government officers are busy travelling abroad, ostensibly for seminars and observation tours. Under the leadership of Chief Secretary Bimal Prasad Koirala, officers from various ministries are busy shuttling to Europe and Africa to attend training programs. Koirala himself is busy preparing for another junket just two days after his return to Nepal. Under-secretary Hari Prasad Nepal who just returned from Malaysia is already on his way to Japan. Four administrators from Ministry of Population and Environment are somewhere abroad. Two more officers from this ministry are in Sri Lanka. After just 10 days of new appointments at the metropolitan municipality office, officials will soon be on a US tour with the deputy mayor of Kathmandu as the delegation leader. All costs and allowances will be borne by the office.

It's nothing new for government officers to indulge in international tours, especially for those who have good relations with INGOs. This usually increases in frequency when retirement approaches.

Junior officers don't get junkets often. Most of the time, the secretary takes a trip meant for junior government officers because of attractive perks and allowances.

Due to the conflict, most donors' money does not reach the villages. The funds are used instead to finance officers' trips for study, research and observation—categorised as 'software' work to learn about good governance and efficient bureaucracy. "Officers travel around and share their experiences but they don't apply anything in office," says Madhab Ghimire, former secretary, who has made more than 40 international visits.

Officers from education, industry, finance, local development and foreign ministries get more opportunities to travel. One secretary from the foreign ministry has been abroad 16 times in the last 18 months. The so-called 'exposure and confidence-building' tours have reduced after directives from the CIAA last year. There was a time when 68 bureaucrats—from section officers to secretaries—made about 84 international trips in just one year. Most of the time, the government officers never revealed the purpose of the visit and funding source, especially when they went through donor agencies.



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How to build a nation

Basic schooling is the foundation of development

JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON

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.

While the report indicates that enrolment in primary schools is increasing around the world, foreign aid from donor countries for boosting enrolment 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 now 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 money is spent, particularly 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 indispensable to increasing economic productivity and improving health, as measured by life expectancy and lower infant mortality rates. Educated people also are 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



KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

women were more likely to be caught up in trafficking, the sex trade and child labour. Similarly, countries with higher levels of secondary school enrolment 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. ● (IPS)

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 journeys further on her portrayal of women as a major subject of expression. Her art shows women in perhaps that most dynamic of roles: motherhood. Her subjects are pensive and somewhat aloof, very different from the usual conventional interpretation of the gender. Her women play with a newborn baby, contemplate with their swollen womb or are wrapped in their 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 texture 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 sequels. ●

(Maheswor Acharya)

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

BIGBEN



MEANWHILE, in the villages, carom universities were thriving: politics of the game or politics?

Golf at 40

Tashi Ghale and Deepak Acharya chat about what it takes

Tashi Ghale is a businessman who owns and runs the Royal Singi Hotel in Kathmandu, and an avid sportsman. Seven years ago, when he turned 40, golf was the last thing on his mind. Today, he ranks as Nepal's top amateur golfer, having proved himself by winning the amateur category in the Surya Nepal Masters 2003 in November and through his contribution to Nepal winning the Team event in the Nepal Amateur Open 2003 in May.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Tashi is now a valuable sponsor for golf in Nepal. It was through his initiative that Nepal's golf team participated at the 2002 Asian Games in Busan. Similarly, with the help of the Nepal Golf Association (NGA), Nepal joined the Asia Pacific Golf Confederation, followed by a team which went to Australia and participated in the prestigious Nomura Cup. Ghale is also the man behind the Nepal Amateur Golf Open 2003. I took the opportunity to interview him last week.

Deepak Acharya: What inspired you to take up Golf?
Tashi Ghale: I used to play football and tennis, and sometimes snooker.



One afternoon eight years ago, my friends Ang Tsering of Thamserku Trekking and Paresh 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, 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 attracted to 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 handicapper.

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 of 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 sad 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 are giving their one hundred 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 Shiva 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, yoga 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

RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

A row is building up between India and Pakistan over India's reluctance to honour a commitment to send its 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, ultra-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government expects to fight 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 materialise.

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 Vajpayee himself. Reports from Islamabad suggest that the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) may seek Musharraf's intervention. The PCB could lose anywhere up to \$25 million in sponsorships and advertisement and television coverage rights, including \$4 million to the Korean electronics giant Samsung that holds the title-sponsorship 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 that they had apprehensions regarding the tour. On Friday, PCB chairman Sharyar 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 severance in sporting ties wrecked commercial prospects at neutral venues where matches were scheduled, such as Singapore, Sharjah and Toronto. Cricket and other sporting matches between the sub-continental rivals invariably prove to be major crowd-pullers because of the extra sizzle. But they are even more ferocious when played on each other's territory. Last year too, a South African team refused to play in Peshawar, which is close to the Afghanistan frontier, while the New Zealanders called off a tour after a bomb went off in front of their hotel in Karachi in May. ● (IPS)

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Notice

Due to the projected and now cancelled bandh of 29 February, the charity golf tournament on behalf of the Spinally Injured has been postponed. The new date is 21 March. We are sorry for the inconvenience.

Postponement of Golf Tournament.

Esha Thapa, Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Center, Jorpati.
Tel: 4470874

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

HEROJIG
(Just out to lunch)

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— Frank Lloyd Wright (1869 - 1959)

Next Change: Herojig wins 2 free tickets to Dragon World and plans for a big day out.

(c) 2004 for all Nepalis 'cause they really copy things well.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Reflection and Reality** Paintings by Erina Tamrakar till 28 February at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Sadhus: The Great Renouncers** Photographs by Thomas Kelly till 29 February at Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
- ❖ **For the sake of love** Sculpture, painting and print exhibition till 2 March at Gallery Moksh, inside Club Hardic, Jhamsikhel. 5528703
- ❖ **Losar:** Tibetan New Year, 21-23 February



EVENTS

- ❖ **Self Reflexology for your feet** 10AM-12PM 22 February. Above Everest Bookstore at Babar Mahal Revisited. Details: Buddha's Feet, 4425931
- ❖ **Aarohan Theatre Group** presents Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls House* at Sama natak ghar, Gurukul, Old Baneshwar. Weekends till 14 March. Tickets: Rs 25 (for students), Rs 50 and Rs 100. Details 4466956
- ❖ **The God's Dance of Kathmandu Valley** 7PM on Tuesdays. Tea+Ticket: Rs 400 at Hotel Vajra.
- ❖ **Tennis shots** Dual tennis courts at The Godavari Village Resort. Facility includes racquet & ball. 5560675
- ❖ **Dhokaima Saturday Haat** from 10AM-1PM at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. Organic vegetables, ceramics and more. 5522113

MUSIC

- ❖ **A-Four Guitar Quartet** 7PM onwards on 20 February. Entry Rs 200. Moksh, Club Hardic, Pulchowk, 5528703
- ❖ **The Trio Givone** Gypsy Jazz band from France Every night from 7PM onwards at the Piano Lounge & Bar, Hotel yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** with Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band every Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's every Friday from 7PM onwards. 4479488
- ❖ **Rock Trends 2060** 2-5PM on 21 February at Dasharath Rangasala. Featuring Robin n Looza:, Mongolian Heart and Deepak Bajracharya.

FOOD

- ❖ **Sunny Side Up BBQ** Weekends at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Friday and Saturday dinners** at Cafe U, Sanepa. 5523263
- ❖ **Bring your wine** along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **Celebrate Losar** Tibetan New Year, 21-23 February at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa, 4480262

GETAWAYS

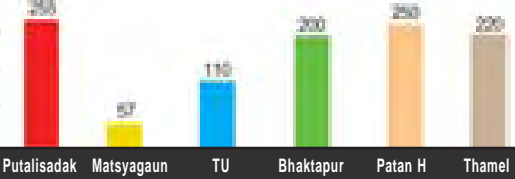
- ❖ **Special halfboard package** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Thank Goodness It's Friday** Dwarika's overnight package. 4479488
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** at the edge of Shivapuri. Email: info@escape2nepal.com

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



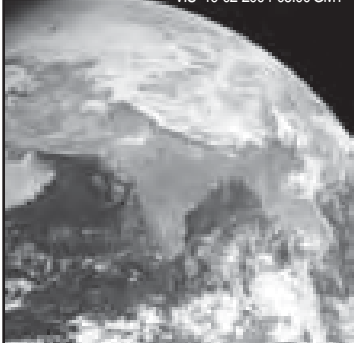
Good	< 60
Ok	61 to 120
Unhealthy	121 to 350
Harmful	351 to 425
Hazardous	>425

The air quality measured at selected stations in Kathmandu last week showed (surprise, surprise) the air unhealthy on most days. It contained PM10 particles of pollution that damage your lungs and harms your health. Since this data takes time to come out, we will have to wait till next week to know the effect of the banda and the strike by petrol dealers. But if past measurements on banda days are anything to go by, the PM10 concentrations will be half the levels on non-banda days along busy streets. Conclusion: the main source of PM10 pollution in our air is vehicular emission.



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS -19-02-2004 05:00 GMT



KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
23-05	23-04	22-04	24-03	24-02

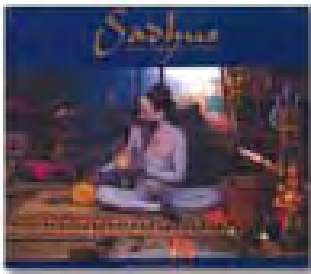
by MAUSAM BEED

This satellite image from Thursday afternoon clearly shows the emerging post-winter transition. The usual westerly fronts have now been shoved northwards by a migrating jetstream. From here on, we will see more and more manifestations of thermal updrafts creating local showers along the mid hills of the Himalaya. The sudden thunderstorm on Sunday was an indication of things to come. On the other side, dusty winds from west India have cast a thick haze over the tarai and lower hills. Morning temperatures in Kathmandu Valley have been warmer than normal thanks to the southerlies, expect warm afternoons with a fresh breeze towards afternoon.

BOOKWORM

Sâdhus: Holy Men of India Dolf Hartsucker
Thames and Hudson, 1993
Rs 1,430

The author has spent many years in close study of these Indian mystics who form a vital and unbroken link between the birth of yoga many millennia ago and the present day. In this authoritative and highly readable account accompanied by spectacular photographs, Hartsucker traces the historical and mythological roots of the ascetics.



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

It has been a while since Hollywood has produced a bonafide 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 comprehensible accent. In *Welcome to the Jungle - The Rundown*, director Peter Berg has wisely kept computer animators on a short leash. The story is simple: Beck (The Rock), a self-described "Retrieval Expert", finds himself in Brazil on his latest job. His mission is to locate Travis (Seann William Scott), his boss's son, and bring him to California. *Welcome* offers everything a good movie of this sort should: plenty of suspenseful action, a few good laughs and a share of obligatory "reluctant buddy" bonding. If you're in the mood for this sort of lighthearted entertainment, it's right on the money.



Welcome to the jungle
The rundown

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HAPPENINGS



NEPALNEWS.COM

DIPLOMAT PILGRIMS: German Ambassador Rudiger Lemp (right) and French Ambassador, Claude Ambrosini at Pashupati on Wednesday on the occasion of Shivaratri.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

BIG HITS: Robin n' Looza: after accepting the HITS FM Music Award for Best Song in a Foreign Language from the British Council's Barbara Hewitt for their song, *One Day @ a Time*.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

BANDA BOY: Mother and son walk it home, leading a group of tourists on New Road during Tuesday's banda.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

BEFORE THE BIG BANG: The army's APCs at the Shivatari Army Day parade on Tundikhel. This picture was taken one hour before Maoists set off an explosion at the Royal Nepal Airlines building in the background.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

OLD IS GOLD: Vintage cars line up at the NADA Auto Show 2004 at the BICC on Wednesday. The car fair goes on till 22 February.

The silly season

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 Banda.

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 x-tra road grip premium treads are now running

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



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-table application of lubricants? And, finally, won't the increased concentration of oxygen in Kathmandu's air be harmful to our unaccustomed 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 Phulpati 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 verbale to the authorities there expressing our deep concern about creeping militarisation in the UK and to remind them that additional Gurkhas 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 unsolicited 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 anarchy. 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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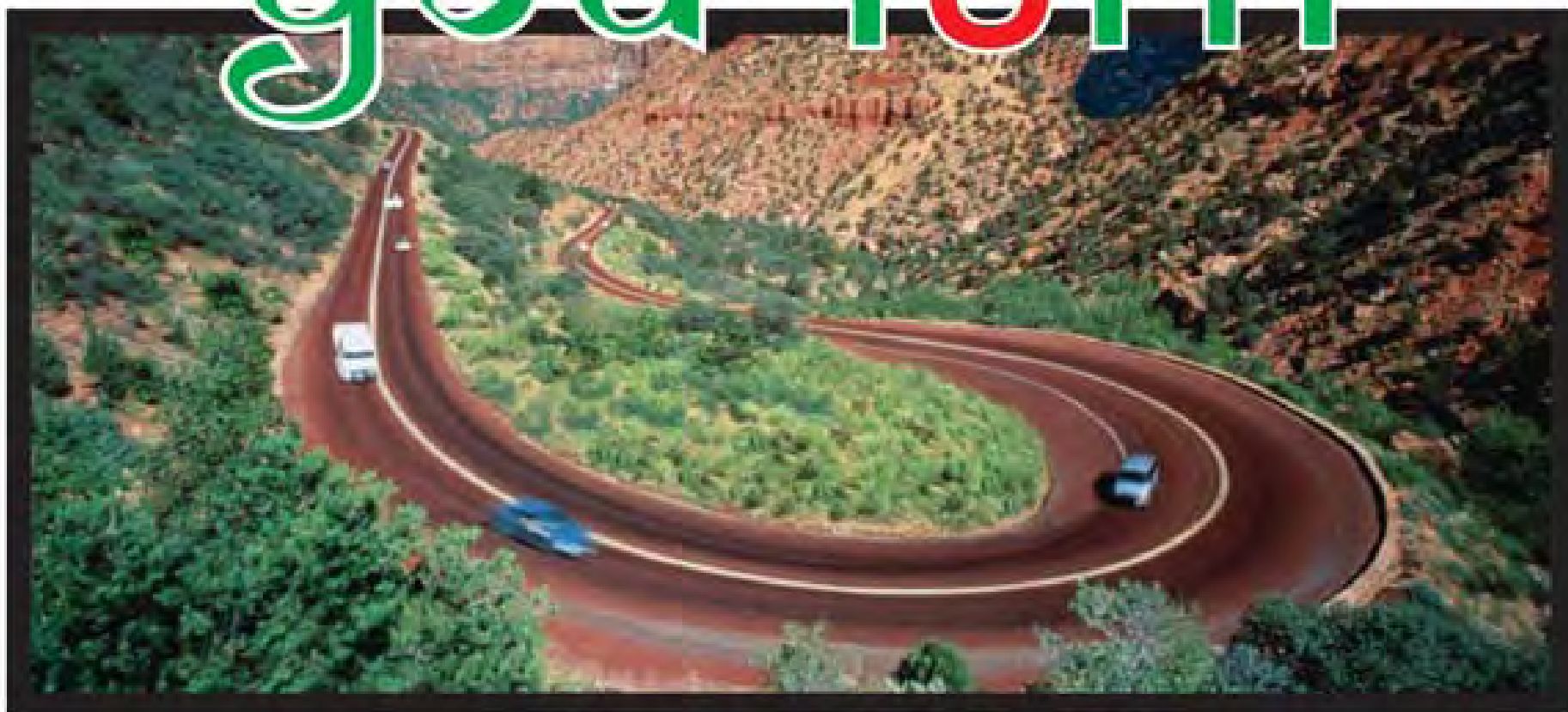
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