



Rizal's fast

Bhutani human rights leader in exile Teknath Rizal says he will soon go on a hunger strike outside the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu if Bhutan does not begin repatriating refugees. Rizal is sending a letter to the Bhutani king asking him to start taking back the 100,000 Bhutani refugees in Nepal and 30,000 in India who were evicted 13 years ago. "If the king does not respond," Rizal said, "I will begin my fast-unto-death." Rizal spent 12 years in jail in Bhutan after being extradited by Nepal's Panchayat government and was released after an international campaign by Amnesty International.



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 125

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

Yes 48.3%

No 43.2%

Don't know 9.9%

Total votes: 991

Weekly Internet Poll # 126. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How would you describe the status of human rights in Nepal?

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UPHILL

UMID BAGCHAND in BAJURA

In the end, it is always ordinary Nepalis who suffer when food is used as a weapon.

When the Maoists looted food destined for the mid and far-western districts two months ago, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) suspended its aid which was a lifeline in this traditionally food deficit area of Nepal. The conflict has made the situation much more precarious and the people of Bajura and other districts are on the move in search of food and work.

Many families from remote areas of Bajura have descended to the district headquarter in Martadi. One of them is Dal Bahadur Biswakarma, who says, "After the food-for-work program pulled out, we had no more hope. We had to come here." He says many of the younger men from his village and adjoining areas have gone to India. The ones who end up in Martadi are the poorest of the poor: they don't even have money for the bus fare to the south.

The WFP aid was the last hope for about 10,000 people in this district who, for the past three years, worked in road and bridge construction in return for food grains. But when the Maoists looted 6,500kg of rice being taken on mountain goats from Sanfëbagar to Bajura on 22 December, WFP suspended its program.

Besides Bajura, the UN has

suspended food aid in Dailekh because of the security situation. Kailali and Kanchanpur of the western tarai have also been hit. However, the WFP's sub-regional chief here, Padam Bahadur Singh, said food for aid is due to restart in Rukum and Rolpalater this year and 400,000kg of grain has been earmarked. The other food aid donor, the German group GTZ, works in 30 districts and also pulled out of Dailekh in December. "But we have received assurances from the Maoists, there is more security now, and we will restart the aid soon," said Dietrich Stotz from GTZ.

However, locals are already running low on food. This is usually the time of year adult men from every family from these parts migrated in search of jobs, but this year entire families are moving out.

At last week's Bajura District Development Committee meeting, the contractor transporting the grain to Bajura was blamed for being hand-in-glove with the Maoists. Committee members hope supplies could restart if the WFP can be convinced it was a security breach.

Local Development Officer Surya Nath Koirala told us many Bajura families are on the verge of starvation. "We are looking at unimaginable suffering if the food-for-work program does not resume." ●

Ballot lesson



KIRAN PANDAY

ADULT FRANCHISE: A student casts her ballot in elections for the Padma Kanya Campus student union on Thursday. Turnout was about 25 percent at valley colleges despite threats and a five-day strike by the Maoists. Analysts took this as an indication that it may also be possible to hold national and local elections if there is political will.





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Afraid of bravery

No wonder we never get ahead: we fear success

There may be many reasons for Nepal's slow progress. But the main one is our fear of success itself.

Politicians fear that national problems may soon be solved. If that happens they will lose their

GUEST COLUMN

Rajeeb L Satyal



power to manipulate. Whether it is the Maoists or the five-party alliance, all fear that a resolution of the crisis will mean they will have to share power. The Maoists would lose their reason for being if the country prospered and if everyone got a good education. Even 'progressive' communists do not want things to go well because that would mean their ideology is inferior. For those who thrive on poverty, prosperity is undesirable. Like bacteria, they thrive on decay.

Dictatorships, too, flourish in times of political instability and upheaval. Violence is their pal. Whenever there is peace, people have time to think about other

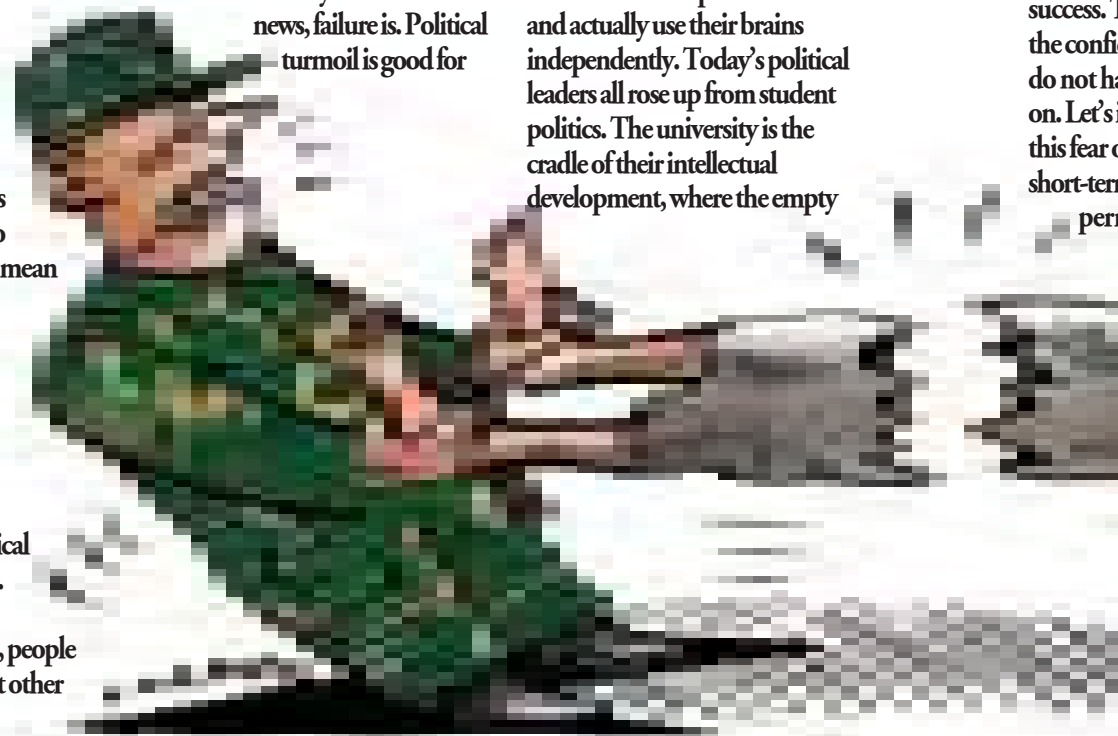
things besides keeping alive: like having a free and independent voice. All around, we see the manifestaion of timid minds that fear success.

The security apparatus in this country has now got a taste of power, their budgets have bloated. Total strength has grown from 45,000 to 70,000, and they are better equipped. An end to conflict now would mean going back to peacetime status.

Media, too, fears success. News is always about the negative, the out of the ordinary. Success is not news, failure is. Political turmoil is good for

circulation. In the business of news, bad news is good news. And of course the pseudo-intellectuals who live like parasites off the media would also lose their chance to pontificate if things are sorted out. In fact, if they are not involved in sorting things out, then they are against anyone else who is.

Ditto for the student union leaders who fear success because they would have to actually go back to their classrooms and study. They would have to stop taking orders from their political mentors and actually use their brains independently. Today's political leaders all rose up from student politics. The university is the cradle of their intellectual development, where the empty



LETTERS

THE POINT

What's the point? your editorial asks (#184). I say, the point is:

Rise up, rise up
you farmer, you worker,
you warrior, you preacher
tell your leaders
that we matter.

Wake up, wake up
you dalit, you women,
you children, you parents
tell the moabadis, the khaobadis,
the political parties, the monarchy
we will not be ignored

Open up, Open up
you janjatis, you paharis,
you madhesis, you bhoiteys
don't you see
we are the power

Get up, Get up
you Nepali, you Gorkhali
raise your hands
to show them the strength

Stand up, Stand up
you city dweller, you villager
fight
for your rights

Come out, Come out
you from the mountains,
you from the hills, you from the terai
show them
your force

Link up, Link up
you Hindus, you Buddhists,
you Muslims
hand in hand
come out into the streets

Shout up, Shout up
you rich, you poor
no more, no more
of this

Roar up, Roar up
you lower class, you middle class,
you upper class
thundering
we have had enough

WE
are the people
We are
by the people



We are
for the people

SN Singh, email

KINGDOM OF STRIKES

From the perspective of distance, it looks like Nepal has become the kingdom of strikes. Last week, there was an indefinite strike by petroleum dealers which was resolved in two days (Tuesday and Wednesday). Early this week there was another indefinite strike by airline operators which ended

within two days (Monday and Tuesday). Starting Wednesday, the Maoists have called a five-day general strike. Another strike called by the transport entrepreneurs promises to be a grand event. Initially, it appeared that many of the problems in our country stemmed from the insurgency and the tussle between the king and the palace. Now, it appears everyone has a problem with everything. If Nepal was a computer, we could just defrag the whole thing, reinstall the hard disc and everything would start functioning again. Why don't people like Prachanda, Baburam, Koirala, Madhab Nepal and all the infected viruses in our nation go on indefinite strike and stop breathing? That would solve all the issues.

Pravesh Saria, email

TRAFFIC GURU

I have jotted down my own Nepal Traffic Rule Book to add to the suggestions provided by David Cloud in 'Trafficking in Kathmandu' (#176) to assist drivers who may need guidance in attempting this extreme sport:

- 1 Whoever occupies the space first, wins.
- 2 Avoid driving into a pothole even if the alternative is a head-on collision.
- 3 If you want to make a right turn then signal right.
- 4 If you want someone to pass you on the right, then signal right.
- 5 Try to drive as far on the wrong side of the road as possible to

- 6 marginalise the expansive plans of oncoming traffic. Otherwise you'll never make it across town.
- 6 Give an angry look to other drivers when they cut you off.
- 7 Give an angry look to the other drivers when you cut them off.
- 8 Its OK to kill someone just make sure you don't injure them. That is far too expensive.
- 9 It is preferable to drive a pick-up truck for a few reasons: you have automatic right of way over everyone else no matter what (except for the large trucks which are gods)
- 10 If you must get home on time... walk.
- 11 Traffic lights are only a suggestion of what to do, so make up your own mind!
- 12 If you are a recent migrant to the city, make sure to cover your eyes when walking across the street. If you cannot see it, it cannot hurt you.
- 13 Insurance for bicycle riders is cheap and lucrative. That's why cyclers seem as if they are trying hard to get themselves hurt.
- 14 If you drive a motorcycle and you can create a three-hour long traffic jam by sliding up along the slow traffic and filling all the gaps, please do it.
- 15 NEVER, EVER, back your car to free up a jam.

PS: Always carry a printed version of these rules so when you get pulled over by police you can show this to them and they will let you go.

Adam Friedensohn, email

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foundations of their careers began. They can't help behaving the way they do.

Non-government bodies thrive on mediocrity and the fear of success. Nepal needs to remain poor, badly-governed, mismanaged, corrupt and inefficient otherwise they would lose their *raison-d'être*. Tax officials don't want to streamline collection procedures and fear anyone who tries to inject some honesty into the system. How else would they be able to squeeze the taxpayer for personal benefits? Taxpayers don't want to pay tax? Ridiculous. It is the tax-collector who doesn't want the people to pay tax.

All of us in our little cocoons behind high walls are afraid of success. The enemy is within us: the confidence and self-esteem we do not have, the insecurity we feed on. Let's individually overcome this fear of success and sacrifice short-term comfort for something permanent and true. ●

NEW DELHI — The alma mater of Baburam Bhattarai is the epicenter of Indian Marxism in all its hues. Named after an illustrious Fabian, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) continues to offer safe sinecures to all shades of crimson. Limo liberals and champagne

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



socialists grace its faculties, seminar rooms resound with echoes of Lenin. Mao is masticated in the mess halls.

Students gather in hostel canteens after a state-subsidised dinner and discuss the revolution that is just around the corner. They have been doing so for the past 40 years. But as soon as they graduate, the students go on to rule the country, they dominate the powerful bureaucracy, including South Block's babudom.

The guru of many of them is Professor SD Muni and they still consult him on South Asian affairs, especially Nepal and Pakistan.

Nepal from JNU

Indians are turning pessimistic about Nepal

The campus rumour is that he briefed Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank on the eve of his departure for Kathmandu. Muni is a cordon bleu republican and doesn't hide his fascination for another JNU alumnus, Baburam Bhattarai. Muni feels the atrocities attributed to Maobadis in Nepal are government propaganda. No surprise, then, that Bhattarai himself still believes the Khmer Rouge's genocide was exaggerated. Bhattarai never studied under Muni, but their views about the Nepal monarchy are identical. At a

1985 in Kathmandu is now a spent force in Nepal.

The other two Nepal 'experts' of Indian academia are Prof Dharmadasani of Banaras Hindu University and Prof Parmananda of Delhi University. Both have little hope for the future of democracy in the country that they have spent their lives studying. The contrast between the despondency of these royalist professors and the upbeat mood of the republican Muni is mystifying.

Even so, the royalists seem to be more representative of the popular pessimism about Nepal in the Indian capital these days. Indian businessmen, politicians and tourists are all in deep gloom about Nepal. A telecom executive who had ambitious investment plans in Nepal commented ruefully: "Granted that the Maoists are in a time-warp, but what are other political parties doing? What is the king doing?" India is shining and Nepal seems to be turning into Somalia.

It is another marriage season in India, but honeymooners are not flocking to Kathmandu and Pokhara these days, and there are no takers for \$10 a night suites. The just marrieds are off to the Maldives and Mauritius, paying 10 times more.

New Delhi has a large population of Nepalis and it is increasing. Most have been driven into exile by the excesses of Maobadi militia and the monarchist military. If political parties could get their act together, this is a large constituency waiting to be built. At JNU itself, there are 25 Nepali students. They have dreams for a New Nepal, but the lack of leadership to transform those dreams into hopes is felt acutely.

For the present, the Indian establishment under US tutelage is solidly behind a constructive monarchy. Academics who want to turn Nepal into a political science laboratory to test their utopian theories are supporting the Maoist experiment. But the common people of north India who remember Indira Gandhi's emergency empathise with what the Nepalis are going through. They themselves are victims of the People's War Group and feel the pain of the relatives of Ganesh Chiluwal.

The challenge for the Nepali Congress and the UML is to channel this tacit support of the silent majority to resurrect democracy. But the message from India after the Shashank visit is: stability in Nepal at all cost, even if democracy has to be postponed. ●

meeting on 15 February in New Delhi to introduce a new avatar of the Maobadi front proscribed by the Indian government, Muni was one of the speakers. He is all praise for Ram Raja Prasad Singh, blissfully unaware that the former terrorist who sabotaged the Nepali Congress' Satyagraha Movement by random bombings of soft targets in

COLOMBIA

Thanks to Karin Eichelkraut for drawing parallels between her motherland and Nepal ('Colombia and Nepal', #184). It is becoming more and more clear with every passing day that Nepali society is becoming more and more militarised. The people, who were traumatised and disgusted with the politics of violence practiced by the Maoists are now falling victim to the atrocities of the security forces. Why the soldiers and policemen have to behave so recklessly when they know their action just breeds more terrorists is beyond comprehension. It must be clear to the senior army generals what is happening on the ground, but it is time to come clean with it and admit that crimes have been committed and publicly punish those culpable. Otherwise the army's reputation is in danger of being permanently tainted. The generals' argument that this would hurt the morale of the soldiers is facetious. Isn't letting abductions, torture and rape going unpunished going to be even worse for their morale if the people turn against them? The Royal Nepali Army must clean up its act, not because the donors are putting pressure on them or the human rights organisations are criticising them, but because if they don't the Nepali people will have lost trust in them. If not, then I'm afraid, we are headed in the same direction as Colombia and Karin Eichelkraut's descriptions will soon apply equally to Nepal as it does to her country.

● Nepal has a long way to go before it becomes Colombia or Guatemala, but Karin Eichelkraut is right that if present trends continue we could be headed in that direction. The emergence of deathsquads and the growing numbers of disappearances shows a disturbing trend, which, unless curbed, will inevitably lead to a complete breakdown of law and order and a rise in petty crime. It is important to heed one particular warning from Colombia: most of the people who are being killed there today are victims of gangland crime and not conflict.

Jens Nordberg, Kathmandu

HEROJIG

Thanks for sharing with us the art of The Adventures of Herojig by Jiggy Gatón. Some of the strip's culture shock shook me into grinning. Is he making a living from this? Let's see some more Herojig.

Ian Powell, San Francisco

● Who is this Herojig? The guy is insane.
Ganesh Malla, Kathmandu



Name withheld on request, email



Some reservations about



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The government is readying a new affirmative action policy, but will it work?

NARESH NEWAR

For the first time in Nepal's history, the government is mulling over a job quota for women and marginalised communities in the civil service.

Dalits, madhesi, other ethnic groups and women will benefit from the scheme which is expected to be implemented by April along the lines recommended by the Reservation Provision-related Advisory Committee led by Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani. The five-member task force has less than 45 days to complete its work.

The reason for the government's rush to take the initiative on affirmative action appears to be aimed at countering the Maoist moves towards local autonomy and to defuse its demand for inclusion of ethnic communities in the national mainstream.

During last year's peace process, the government conceded to the Maoist demand to establish a reservation policy which included proposals for a five-year quota system in the civil service: 20 percent for women, 10 percent for dalits and five percent for indigenous communities. Following protests, the government formed a committee to come up with new recommendations. Time is running out and many wonder if the job can be finished on time.

"This is a landmark for the government," says Dambar Narayan Yadav, member of Nepal Sadhabana Party and coordinator of a sub-committee for reservation

for madhesi people. "The tarai population has been politically debarred from equal participation and left out of economic and development processes."

The sub-committee looking at quotas for women is recommending proportional representation based on the national census. Women have only eight percent of civil service jobs, only two percent of judges are female. "There are 525 females working in government jobs and most are still not considered permanent staff even after working there for decades," says Durga Pokhrel of the National Women Commission. Pokhrel says there should be at least one seat for a female joint-secretary in each ministry. "It's time to act now and this is the right way. Just talking about women's problems will not result in action," she told us.

Figuring out a quota system for madhesi, janjati and dalit communities may be easier said than done. There are over 100 ethnic and caste groups in the country and there is no agreement about which are eligible for reservation. Many fear quota percentages might be excessive in some cases and end up leaving others out altogether.

While the reservation policy sounds good in theory, many are sceptical about whether it will work in practice in reducing social exclusion. There are also questions on why the government is in such a rush to implement the policy by April.

"There is immense pressure from donor agencies," a janjati activist,

Miami's vices

Politics here is wild, weird, wacky and wicked, just as in Nepal

Humans, I now believe, were meant to live at sea level. We are, after all, distant relatives of water creatures. Our ancestors crawled out of the primordial soup, grew legs and lungs and eventually became us. That is, they started falling in love, making art and committing genocide on a regular basis.

I sit now by the Atlantic Ocean in Miami Beach, Florida, almost at the southwestern extremity of the United States. I'm in a concrete and steel building but I feel as if a one metre wave could slop onto the beach and get my shoes wet. How else to explain my new propensity to stay up late (reading of course), in defiance of Kathmandu's mandatory

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



bed before midnight rule? I don't seem to get so tired here. And, errr, everyone gets to wear

shoes wet, even here at my desk and computer on the second floor.

But I have to say, the breathing is easy. Nothing like a sea breeze to blast away the pollution. There's plenty of oxygen and fewer clothes here. Hindu orthodoxy is nowhere to be found. Not that there isn't plenty that's familiar to a Nepal hand here. Miami politics is wild, weird, wacky and wicked, just as it is in the Himalayan Kingdom.

Famously, a somewhat colourful senior official of the law

department here was drummed out of office a few years ago for biting a woman dancer on her posterior. In public and very hard. He's now back in politics. Call him our Khum Bahadur Khadka, with a few differences. Here our monarch is King Jeb Bush, of America's great ruling dynasty. They may not have united the country in a heroic series of battles a couple of hundred years ago, but they're working at disuniting it in the same manner.

Miami is home to a proud local populace with a deep culture that feels itself under lasting siege from incomers.



Our Newars are the native Floridians, descendants of the original settlers and even the American Indians who've been here as a people for thousands of years. The outsiders are from everywhere else in the world—cold bits of the US and Canada, the Caribbean, South America, Haiti and especially Cuba. In fact, it's the Cuban politicians that make this place seem as if it were run by the Nepali Congress Party in full grab. They're colourful, lively and rather unashamed of how much they manage to accumulate in their time in office. No wonder these guys want nothing to do with Fidel Castro and his communists.

There's a very relaxed attitude to life here. Like Nepalis, people take 'sun baths'. They relax a lot. They drink alcohol at lunchtime or early afternoon, they love food and fun and tell jokes about most things, especially politics. That is now disappearing in Nepal, I'm sorry to say, shattered at first by the growing Maoist rebellion, then the Narayanhiti massacre and finally by the failures of the Nepali ruling elite to take the situation seriously. When I first came to Kathmandu, I thought I'd arrived in South Asia's version of the Caribbean. Now the country is danger of turning into Haiti.

I suggest that our aid sector sponsor junkets to Florida, instead of Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka, so Nepalis can see the road ahead more clearly. ●

reservation



MIN BAJRACHARYA

who has reservations about reservation, told us. Nepal's donors are convinced the root of the country's inequities stem from social exclusion and are pushing for a proactive government approach to redress the imbalance. They have even threatened to pull out funding if the policy is not implemented soon.

"The Netherlands has already taken a strong stand," a government source, confirming the pressure, told us. The UNDP is hiring international consultants to develop its own plans for reservation in case the government committee fails to deliver. This has angered officials, who say the UN is wasting money. "There is no need for the UNDP to duplicate the work of the government and spend so much on international consultants," said one official, who requested anonymity.

Several janjati activists are asking the government not to jump into the reservation bandwagon without studying the implications just because of donor pressure. They say the policy may fail to achieve its goal of proportionate representation for all communities in the civil service,

and may even result in greater disparities and discord. "This policy might never be implemented," says anthropologist and researcher, Mukta Lama. "There are no associated laws or a systematic approach needed to make it successful."

The haste with which the Maoists started declaring ethnic-based autonomous regions, most recently Magarant and Tharuwan, appears to be an effort to stay one step ahead of the government. This may explain the government's tearing hurry to get the job finished.

Some independent researchers admit affirmative action elsewhere in the world has met with mixed results but do not doubt that a well-planned quota policy is necessary because of Nepal's entrenched exclusion. Says Bal Gopal Baidya, former member of the National Planning Commission: "Obviously, this is a controversial issue, but affirmation action is needed. Things will not change on their own."

Bahun, Chettris and Newars together make up 37 percent of the population but dominate 82 percent of politics, bureaucracy and

education. Twenty percent of Nepalis are dalits, but there hasn't been a single dalit minister since 1990.

Surprisingly, it is dalit and janjati activists who are not convinced about reservation. "The main problem is a centralised and unitary governance system, so what is more urgent is devolution to a federal democratic structure by establishing ethno-linguistic autonomous regions without compromising the unity of our nation," says activist and academician Bal Krishna Mahubang.

Buddhiman Tamang, adviser to the National Federation of Indigenous Communities, agrees: "What the government is doing is quite revolutionary and we really appreciate it, but this is something an elected government should be doing. Right now, this might just be a political gimmick."

Activists doubt that the government's small task force on reservation can do justice to such an enormous problem. Why not start with local self-governance, they say, that will lead automatically to greater representation of minorities and help pull the rug from under the Maoists.

●

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Brussels group denounces Delhi

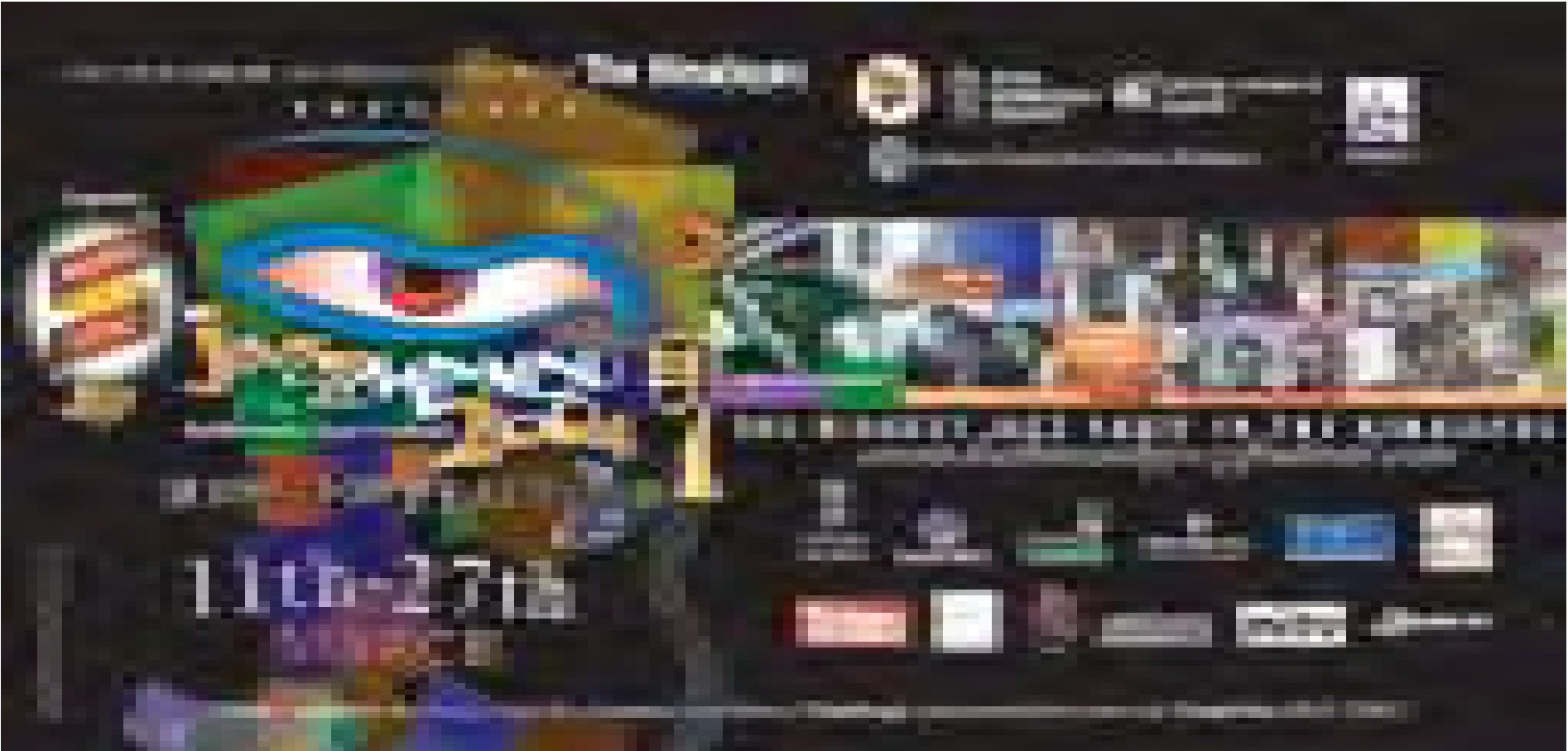
A pro-Maoist group of Nepalis in Brussels has strongly condemned the Indian government for the extradition of Matrika Yadav and Suresh Ale Magar on 8 February, and says: "This despicable act has stunned and shocked the democratic and revolutionary people and ignited fury among Nepali people the world over."

Besides flaying the government, king and army, the communiqué signed by Surendra Bhusan, also blames "US imperialism" for supporting the counter-insurgency war. It said successive governments in Kathmandu have broken previous ceasefires even though the Maoists had pushed the agenda for a "forward-looking political settlement".

But the group singled out India for special condemnation, saying: "This act of Indian regime is a blatant support to the unjust war of royal regime against the Nepali people...we are extremely shocked by this despicable act of the Indian government and we strongly condemn the arrest of any leaders and any citizens who are handed over to the murderous regime of Nepal."

Melamchi management bidders

Although Melamchi construction has ground to a halt, five foreign companies have applied to manage Kathmandu's water supply. Two are British, two French and one German, but officials at the Melamchi Water Supply Project would not name them. "We will go through the letters and short list the names of the bidders," Noor Tamarakar of the Kathmandu Valley Management Support Committee said. The management contract will be for four years initially and will be extended for another two if the performance of the operator is found successful. Two earlier biddings ended inconclusively after the French company, Vivendi, was the only final bidder. Melamchi's donors have said tunnel construction of the \$464 million project must not begin unless the management contractor for distribution of the water is selected.



Gone bird watching

No Nepali Maoists were sighted at a Maoist solidarity meeting in London

Wearing a Barbour and armed with a trusty binocular and notepad, London Eye went bird watching last week to try to catch a rare glimpse of that elusive species: 'CPN-M (London)' and its flock. Sightings in its new migratory

LONDON EYE
Joti Giri



habitat are rare because it has no distinctive markings or features on its coat or head, even in its favourite hunting grounds of South East London or sunny Royal Berkshire.

The bird sanctuary for this particular expedition was one of capitalism's premier educational institutions in central London, a stone's throw from the comrades' favourite broadcasting medium. Ironies abound.

Much to our disappointment, the CPN-M (London) did not make its appearance. But like relics from a bygone era, old Marxists were spotted in abundance still dreaming and harping on of a collective utopia. This breed seems

to have failed to see through its blinkers post-1990 and 9/11. There is a new world order, Uncle Sam's hegemony.

It was surreal: sitting in the middle of London, 200 yards from the Thames, to hear stirring tirades that predicted Nepal would fall any minute and become the beacon and the inspiration for a glorious new trend across the globe for people's revolutions. The mouthpiece (probably an ex-PKK or an Iranian communist) was exhibiting traits more like his cousin from across the Tigris, Comical Ali.

It was him and not the Nepali media who was deploying the weapons of mass deception. The days of *cause celebre* and trendy activism like the pro-Sandinista public meetings of the 1980s are long past in London, but it looks like discussions on foreign revolutions will never be completely passé.

So where were they, the CPN-M leaders, the diaspora cadre, during this networking opportunity? Why didn't they attend the very event organised to show international solidarity to

their struggle? Do they only fly by night to meet up in some dark smoke-filled room? Even here? Do they have to be, or are they underground forming sleeper cells like other 'normal' terrorists? Or was the meeting too bourgeois? Maybe this just wasn't the habitat for our particular species of waders.

There is an unofficial estimate that a quarter of the Nepali population in London are 'Maoist-affected people'. The so-called Maoists therefore must have been busy: not with spreading the class struggle, but with the struggle of basic human survival in this wet and miserable second city of capitalism. What a bitter contradiction for comrades here in the metropolis where Marx is buried.

London, even more so than the DC belt area, is a microcosm of Nepali society. There are all here: Little Darjeeling, Little Na Tole, Little Dharan Camp, Little Durbar, Little Kaski, Little Pahad, Little Thamel, Little Kanth and Little Tibet. So there must be a Little Rolpa somewhere, too. But why don't they even appear at an

Karl Marx's grave at Highgate Cemetery in London.



international solidarity function to mark the eighth anniversary of their war?

One can only conclude that, as with other Nepali migrants, it is a desire for a better livelihood rather than ideology that is the motivational driver. Britain, therefore, is a natural migratory destination for this species. "Once all struggle is grasped, miracles are possible," Mao Zedong once said. Yes, the struggle can be grasped, not by the barrel of the gun but by the sweet incentives of global capitalism.

In all this, maybe there is a role for Britain. After all, we have strong historical links and an enduring awe and fascination of all things British by our Anglophile

establishment. All this must count for something for London to leverage its position to broker a deal and rescue the country it did not want to colonise.

To take the avian analogy a bit further, they could even kill two birds with one stone: restore peace in Nepal and enhance Tony Blair's standing as a true international leader. Blair gave his deep conviction, Christian values and morals, right over wrong, as one of his guiding principles in the headlong dash to join Iraq's 'war of liberation'. Fine principles indeed, but can these principles be extended to bring peace in Nepal? Miracles do happen. But Nepal's misfortune perhaps is that it doesn't have Iraq's strategic worth.

Pro-Maoist meet in London

The London-based World People's Resistance Movement and the Anti-Racism and Anti-Imperialism Organisation organised a public hearing to mark the eighth anniversary of the Maoist 'People's War' in Nepal.

Seventy people gathered on 18 February in a dingy little room at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), but there was a genuine sense of solidarity among participants during the three-hour session. The program began with a video screening of a mass rally on 3 April 2003 organised by the Maoists at Tundikhel during the ceasefire period. The video carried the now-famous speech by Baburam Bhattarai in which he said: "We have shed too much blood, suffered inhumane torture and oppression. Now it is time for us to look forward to a brighter future, one

which is filled with peace and freedom." The video was greeted with applause.

An Iranian read a paper on the people's war in Nepal and its underlying reasons, which he said were the inability of Nepal's ruling classes to meet the basic needs of the people, address inequities as well as their failure to stand up to Nepal's "hegemonistic, imperialist" neighbour, India. He also accused "imperialist powers" such as Britain and the United States of trying to undermine the Nepali revolution.

A discussion followed with a Nepali student saying he didn't believe in the Maoist ideology of violence. This provoked a long discussion on violence as a means of revolution. (Bimbika Sijapati)



Daju Bhai

India-Nepal ties are on the mend, but is Big Brother taking undue advantage of Kathmandu's feeble state?

Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank's visit to Nepal has triggered the usual fallout of suspicions and controversy in Nepal. A periodic assessment of bilateral issues of interest is an absolute must. Successive governments in Kathmandu had agreed to regularly review the whole gamut with India, including the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, at the foreign secretary level.

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



An analysis of these exercises should therefore be made in the proper context and perspective, not from rigid mindsets.

The absence of openness in the conduct of foreign policy, lack of consensus-building on issues of bilateral and multilateral importance, and dual postures of the government during the negotiation and in public (especially on the Nepali side) have favoured controversy in the past.

Shashank's visit was no exception. However, his visit this week took place amidst a new closeness between Nepal and India that occurred both by necessity and the experience of past mistrust, especially on matters of security. Intelligence sharing on the border and the effectiveness of the Joint Working Group, mainly towards

curbing 'terrorism' and major crimes, have yielded results. The handovers of Maoist leaders Matrika Yadav and Suresh Ale Magar in the weeks prior to the visit was meaningful.

Moving on from there, the two sides have agreed to open their roads for public transport. Any legitimate deal with India in a spirit of equality and good-will will deliver opportunities, but failure to manage them could invite bigger problems as well. Kathmandu has not yet been able to explain or inform the people how the new transport arrangements will benefit the Nepali economy. This is vital as India has also shown its willingness to extend its railway network into Nepali border towns at four points.

Nepal cannot, and should not, remain a landlocked island. It should explore connecting its southern and northern boundaries for trade, commerce, tourism and easier access for people. But a cost-benefit assessment of such moves has to be worked out in advance, and explained to the people.

The move to amend or "enlarge the scope" of the half-a-century old extradition treaty has not made much headway apparently, because the Indian insistence on repatriation of third party nationals was not to Kathmandu's liking.

If true, this should dispel widespread fears and allegations that the Thapa government is



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KIRAN PANDAY

Indian Ambassador Shyam Saran exchanging agreement papers with Nepali Labour and Transport Management Secretary Narayan Silwal on Monday, while Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank and his Nepali counterpart Madhuraman Acharya look on.

willing to sell-out to India. Enlarging the scope of the extradition treaty should be seen in the context of an ongoing 'global war on terror' and its international ramifications.

It will be a major diplomatic failure if Nepal fails to convince its southern neighbour that it is as committed as India in cracking down on border crimes and terrorism, but we have to be careful the clause on third party extradition will not take us too far.

Apart from these issues, the management and exploitation of

Nepal's water resources will always remain the most crucial component of our bilateral relationship. The demands made by India's vast economy and the supply of Nepal's untapped water potential will no doubt bring the two together. But any decision has to be in conformity with the constitution of Nepal. An understanding between the two sides beginning with the Upper Karnali, especially during the absence of an elected parliament has the potential to create rancour. Article 126

requires ratification of any treaty involving natural resources was inserted into the 1990 Constitution on the basis of perceived inequities in the Kosi and Gandak barrages. The current understandings on different projects totaling 1,700MW will raise the suspicion that a democratic India has been trying to derive undue benefit from a faltering regime in Kathmandu. This may, in fact, make the transparency of future bilateral deals even more difficult. ●

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Qualitech Scan

Can we bank on the Internet?

Till we have cyber laws in place, e-banking is likely to remain e-lusive

KHADGA SINGH

The myriad commercial banks that have started up in Nepal seem have done at least one thing right: identify their clients.

This target group trusts its cash to their chosen bank and expects more services facilities and in return, like e-banking for instance. This latest service may seem a distinct oddity in a country that lacks cyber laws, and where less than 0.1 percent of the population has access to a computer, but for educated city dwellers and the Nepali upper middle class, e-banking is now a mouse click away.

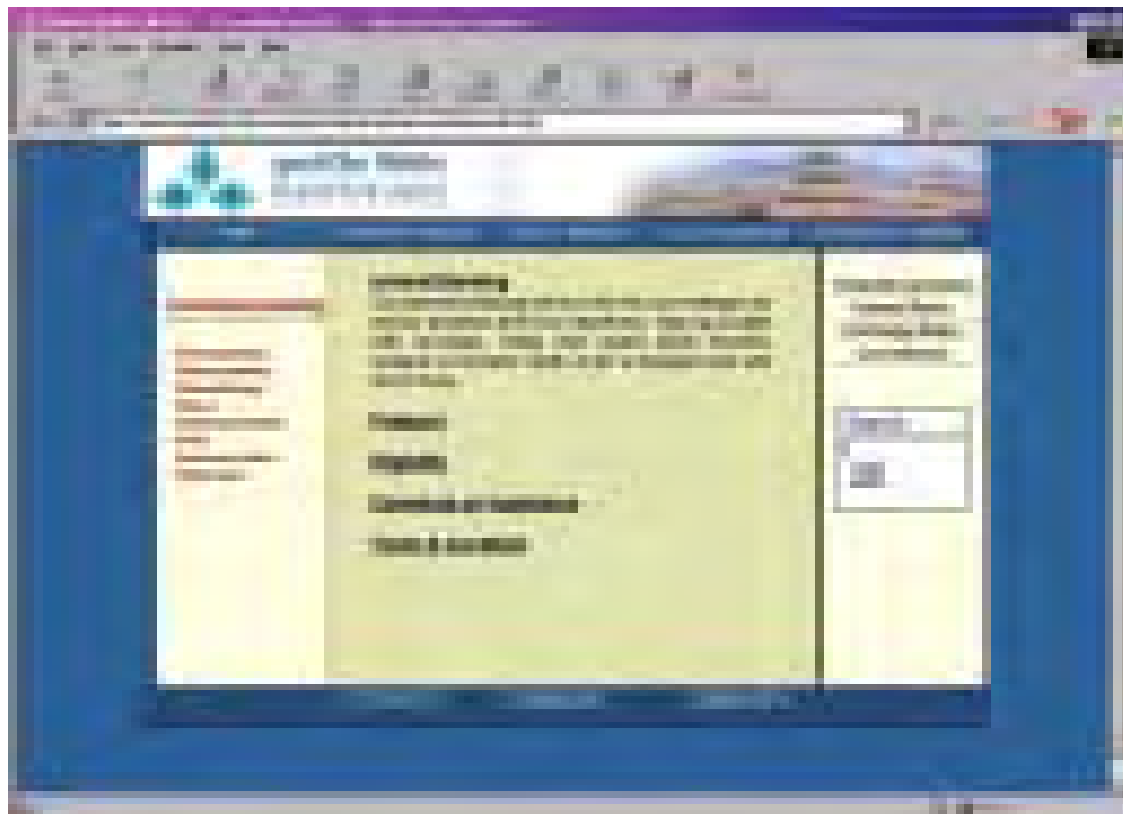
Bank account holders now have all kinds of services at their finger tips such as checking their balance statements by SMS. It is just a question of time before they can start paying telephone, electricity and other bills online.

While this may be old hat in developed countries, these services are seen as a big stride in Nepal. Had there been proper cyber laws in place, our banks could have attempted more advanced transactions. In its absence, commercial banks are cautious about introducing basic e-banking facilities, although they are encouraged that most clients are educated enough to understand e-banking, and fortunate enough to access the Internet with ease.

After the successful launch of its Internet banking two years ago and mobile banking recently, Kumari Bank is at the forefront of the innovation. Customers need no longer stand in queues to pay bills or fees. All they have to do is log on to the net, go to the bank website and enter their account number and password. The final click of the mouse will transfer money from their account to their service providers.

“This is possible for clients who are authorised to make such transactions,” said Kumari Bank’s Surendra Bhandari. “For that, both the parties must have accounts with us.”

Other banks have not reached as far. Some are planning to introduce basic services like allowing their clients to check their accounts through the Internet. "We have begun a pilot project for this facility," says Himalayan Bank's Suman Neupane. "We will gradually expand the periphery of this service."



Banks have yet to install a third party payment system through the Internet. Even Kumari Bank's arrangement works only among group accounts. Banks can increase their transactions through e-banking only if they use the technology for activities like shopping. In the recent CAN exhibition, the stall for muncha.com promoted Internet browsing of the outlet's different products and placing an online order.

E-shopping would pick up dramatically if consumers can use their bank accounts to make payments to shopkeepers or service providers through the Internet. Without this, the service is very basic and likely to remain static.

The banks are in no rush. Most of them feel that bigger transactions through the Internet means risking fraud. Payments may not reach the desired destination or false claimants could result in heavy settlement expenses. "Risks are always there in business," says Neupane. "And there is no protection in the laws of the land."

His view is shared by every bank looking into e-banking. "If we have cyber laws, then only digital signatures are recognised," says Bhandari. "Right now, whatever

transactions we are doing through the Internet are just limited to one-to-one deals." This means the unlimited reach of the Internet has been limited to only few basic services.

Bankers are aware that the government has not been able to do anything about cybercrime, for example when ISPs fall victim to hackers. “How can we operate banking services when there is no way to nab criminals in the cyber world?” asks Neupane.

ISPs say they have raised the issue with the government. "It wasn't any use," said Binay Bohara of Vianet Communications. "They don't even understand what we are talking about." Another ISP provider says the last time a hacker was taken to the police, the officer asked whether he had used a knife or a khukuri. "The police had no idea what hacking was all about," he said.

Officials at the Ministry of Science and Technology say a draft cyber law is ready. "But we have not been able to take further steps because it needs to go through parliament," a senior official said. "The government has other priorities at the moment so we have no choice but to wait." ●



Kolkata bans bandas

While Nepal reels under successive bandas, the erstwhile hartal capital of the world, Kolkata, has banned them.

"Bands belong to Kolkata's regressive past," writes noted Indian columnist Bachi Karkaria in the *Times of India* this week. "The only way to deal with them is to cripple them, bring them to a halt, indeed paralyse them with all the subversive methods with which they have stymied West Bengal's progress for decades."

Last August, the Supreme Court banned strikes by government officials and hartals saying it respected trade union rights, but citizens had rights too. After hartals were banned, Kolkata sprung back. The economy has picked up and business is booming.

But last week there was another banda: a blast from the past. There is a lot of opposition from those who have benefited from the boom. Writes Karkaria: "Kolkatans are reveling in the new writing on the wall, they shouldn't let a bunch of has-beens sabotage a long-delayed future." Is it time for Nepal to think of not repeating Kolkata's mistake and learning from India's ban on bandas?



BIZ NEWS

Making the grade

iExplore, the world's leading resource for off-the-beaten-path travel has recently published its top 10 routes for exploring a *pié* run the gamut from day-tripper walks and hikes to multiweek treks in its website: www.iexplore.com. In its admittedly audacious picks for the world's top adventures on foot, Nepal's Hiking Annapurna Circuit ranks number one, described as a, "classic Himalayan trek is a classic for good reason: It encapsulates the best of Nepal, wrapping around the stunning Annapurna range to put you in the shadow of peaks that pierce 26,000ft. Yak herds, eagle-like Himalayan griffons, blue sheep, fluttering Buddhist prayer flags, and hot springs dot this central Nepal route, which starts in lush green foothills and climbs into high-altitude desert typical of the Tibetan plateau." In the Whitewater Rafting category of iExplore, Nepal's Karnali River White Water Rafting has been given seventh place describing it as, "the Karnali's source is Tibet's sacred Mount Kailash, possibly the reason this Class V river is so divine." The Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP) placed ninth in iExplore's safari category.

Global SMS

In less than six months of launching its portal NepalOnline.com, ITNTI announced its global access for short messaging service (SMS). Now people can log onto NepalOnline and send SMS to almost 70 percent of the countries in the world. The service is limited to the website's subscribers but free SMS trials are available for Nepali mobiles.

NEW PRODUCTS

GREENER FIELDS: Gilbey's Green Label whiskey has been launched in the Nepali market by Triumph Distillery. Touted as "rich and smooth", the brand has reportedly proved itself popular in the Asian market. It comes from the same company that distills Johnnie Walker and is available in three stylish packs starting at Rs 99.94 for 180ml.

TV/PC: A television that functions like a personal computer, the fantasy of every Internet junkie who occasionally watches the soaps, is now available at Constellation in Kathmandu. The Miyake TVPC 1588 is both a powerful PC and an excellent entertainment system—consider the DVD/CD player, MP3 player, internal modem, 15" LCD monitor and superb sound system. And yes, it comes with a remote control.

KEEPING COOL: Voltas Coldcel, a Tata Enterprise, is a market leader in commercial refrigeration and preservation with half a century of experience behind them. Their entire range of products, including commercial air conditioning units, will be available at competitive prices through Electro Appliances in Nepal.

Mixing oil and money

Deregulate, and end fuel adulteration

Things haven't changed much in the three years since this paper started carrying investigative reports on oil dealers and adulteration ('Nepal oil corruption' #19). When the government recently announced that it was going to remove kerosene dealerships out of gas stations, the oil barons called for a

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed



nationwide shutdown. As the gas lines grew, the government lost its nerve and gave in. The irony is that the oil sector is controlled and owned by the state. The end product is sold through distributors, most of whom have thoroughly greased palms for their dealerships. They adulterate the oil with subsidised kerosene to plump up profits. In the past 15 years or so, new cars, models and makes have entered the Nepali market. But even if a car owner were willing to pay premium prices for good fuel, there is none available. The only things we can admire Nepali ingenuity for is using kerosene as a complete substitute for diesel. Nepal's kerosene consumption has increased two-fold in the past three years while other oil imports remain stagnant. Kerosene was subsidised for the poor till the fuel adulteration barons figured it could work as

KIRAN PANDAY

well in the automobile industry. The government does not have any way to regulate kerosene. It keeps the prices of petrol high so that a cross subsidy on kerosene continues. The only answer is that the government remove itself from the business of importing and dealing in oil. Next, it must do away with subsidies and begin a coupon system for those who really need kerosene. This will make it next to impossible for industries or automobile owners to gather enough coupons to fill their tanks. It's a pity that successive governments in Nepal avoided the subject of deregulation. It's a political hot potato that could create difficulties for their campaigns. But, since the present government does not intend to hold an election any time soon, there is no better time to implement some radical changes in

the fuel industry. We should learn from India. Indian consumers today have access to better products and distribution. Nepali oil dealers, like many other businesses, understand that the government indirectly protects their interests. If the sector is opened, they also realise the regional and international players who will jump in the game are not in the adulteration business. Surely, the answer is de-regulation of the sector and to treat the import, storage, distribution and retailing of oil products separately. Allow private sector entry into these businesses in a regulated manner and soon we'll have better oil and better air. It is also important that consumer forums find better ways in dealing with the issue and really pressure the government to end the monopoly of a state player and a business cartel. ●

Halving absolute poverty by 2015

Nepali Times: Given the mixed track record in Asia to meet past targets, do you think the Millennium Development Goals are achievable?
Kim Hak-Su: On average, our projection shows that it will be achieved. But there is great variation both across sub-regions as well as individual countries. In particular, the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries and some of the economies in transition may not be able to achieve the target. Moreover, due to growth in population, the absolute number of poor living below \$1 day will continue to be a cause for concern.

Besides the sheer scale of population, how are our problems different from Africa?
The Asian context is different from other regions. It remains one of the most dynamic segments of the global economy. And that helps. But many countries will not be able to achieve the targets in areas such as hunger, child mortality, maternal mortality and environmental sustainability. In fact, although we may be able to address the issue of income poverty quite effectively, the challenge of human poverty will remain with us for quite some time unless drastic action is taken. We have gained a lot of experience in addressing these challenges. Ultimately, it will depend on each country how it sees these challenges and what measures it ought to adopt. In my view, more target-oriented action, backed up by sufficient resources and the participation of all stakeholders, will be a key component of the responses countries might wish to follow.

Everyone agrees on concepts like 'good governance' and 'sustainable development', but the problem has always been in getting these things to work on the ground. What are the prerequisites that need to be in place?
In fact, these are the prerequisites for achieving the goals. The Millennium Declaration spells out several values and norms that must accompany efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. As I said earlier, national commitment is an absolutely key determining factor. Along with that, several things need to be in place: growth and poverty reduction must

Kim Hak-Su is the executive secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and Pacific based in Bangkok. He is in Kathmandu this weekend to attend a regional conference on the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to halve poverty by 2015. He answered questions from Nepali Times on progress so far.

be sustained over time; increases in inequality need to be avoided; countries must invest in education and health of the population; they must promote the rights of women; and a broad range of partnerships need to be forged, both at home and internationally, to achieve these goals. There is an argument that the MDG targets are just a way for the international aid community to show it's doing something, and divert attention from addressing the structural socio-economic roots of the governance dilemma within countries. The MDGs provide a framework for human development. It does not substitute for the necessity to have right policies and strategies in place. Those have to be devised by the countries concerned in cooperation with their partners. Appropriate strategies can then address the structural issues.

In the time since the goals were announced, what has been the trend? Are we on target?
As I mentioned earlier, the situation differs from sub-region to sub-region, from country to country. On the whole, we seem to be on the way to reach the income poverty target. But other targets may prove to be quite difficult to achieve at the current trend. Moreover, as we move towards our target year of 2015, we are likely to encounter the more hard-core poor who will need a different combination of policies and programmes than we followed in the past. Equally, non-income dimensions of poverty are likely to feature more prominently in national agenda as we approach 2015.



Letter from America

The Americans are heading for elections in November as a deeply fractured nation. They are divided over the war in Iraq, over domestic health policies, tax cuts, education spending, budget deficits, trade agreements, gay marriages, environmental issues, immigration policies, jobs losses and the foreign policy.

The Nepali people also have never been as divided as they are today. But unlike the Americans who let elections decide which side wins, in Nepal the electoral process set by the 1990 constitution lies in tatters.

That constitution was expected to herald a new Nepal by institutionalising a representative, democratic and inclusive polity that would begin efforts to deliver basic services to citizens. In the first

NEPALI PAN
Ajaya Dixit



election, the Nepali Congress, a party committed to social democracy won with the UML in opposition to provide a power balance, while the monarchy remained constitutional. But things soon started to go terribly wrong and the new institutions could not respond to the new challenges.

The US has faced serious challenges. But, over the years, the Americans have overcome them and, in the process, built their political institution. Closer to home, the Indians have managed to sustain a democratic process too. They elected new chief ministers in four states in December 2003 and soon will begin the process of electing their new prime minister. Though imperfect and ridden with limitations, both the American and Indian forms of electoral processes have worked.

One of the reasons for the derailment of the electoral process in Nepal is because of faults in the practice of implementation of the constitution. The American and Indian constitutions were incomplete when they were first drafted but both have space for amendments. As new challenges have emerged, both constitutions have been amended. In Nepal, however, the new constitution was projected to be the 'best' in the world, with suggestions from its crafters and implementers that it needed no amending.

It became clear, as the framework began to be implemented, that the constitution's provisions alone would not be able to address Nepal's problems. Clearly, adjustments were necessary and amendments had to be introduced. The 1990 Constitution has provisions for amendments that require any amendment be passed by a two-thirds majority of the parliamentary members. Between them, the NC and the UML enjoyed a comfortable majority in successive parliaments, but amendments were never considered though limitations had already been highlighted. Instead, successive governments and parliaments allowed only a few to corner all the power, resources and opportunities thus making the governmental business exclusionist but rudderless. The only time Nepali lawmakers came together to muster a two-thirds majority in the parliament was when the treaty on the Mahakali River was ratified on the night of 20 September 1996.

How and when will a participatory electoral process emerge in Nepal through which the Nepali people can express their differences through a ballot and not by killing each other? These questions haunted me as I observed American Democrats going through the primaries of electing their nominee to take on George W Bush. Peace and elections in Nepal seemed so far away.

"Thinkers prepare the revolution; bandits carry it out," wrote Mariano Azuela, referring to Mexico of a century ago. Azuela's statement also became true in Nepal of the 1990s as the country's thinkers allowed banditry of malfeasance, ideological bankruptcy and loss of community with the people corrupt the gains of the 1990 revolution.

Nepalis must, however, begin rebuilding on the foundations laid by the 1990 'People's Movement'. The good news is that everyone remains beholden to its spirit. King Gyanendra keeps reiterating his commitment to multiparty democracy, the main political parties are faithful to the parliamentary process and the latest statement by Maoist leader Comrade Prachanda mentioned, "achievements of the popular movement of 1990". So, where is the problem? Given this reference to the spirit of the people's movement a consensual way forward should be achievable, hopefully to begin the electoral processes. Cultivating tolerance and engaging in creative dialogues will help build trust to arrive at such a consensus.

Water Analyst Ajaya Dixit wrote this piece while in Boulder, Colorado on a month long writing assignment.

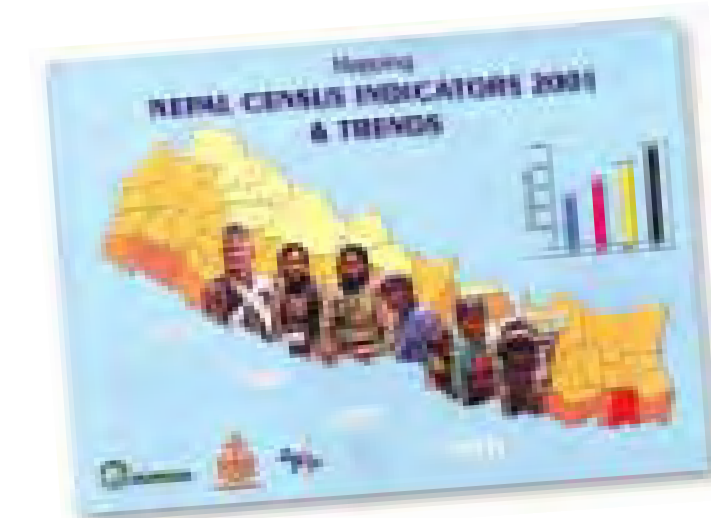
A time atlas of Nepal

Maps that let us quickly find out which districts have made progress since 1971, and which haven't

Maps are static. They show the world flat, as it is. But what if you wanted to see Nepal's progress in development, or lack thereof? And suppose you wanted that segregated by district? Information in both time and space.

That is exactly what the recently published *Mapping Nepal Census Indicators 2001 and Trends* has done. Brought out by ICIMOD, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Dutch aid group, SNV, the book plots census data from 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001, and divides them by district. The maps mean more than just which districts are ahead in schooling for girls, infant health, fertility rate, etc. They also show how much progress each district has made and which ones are lagging behind.

The beauty of it is that you can make these trends out at a glance, without having to pore through pages and pages of figures. And because the districts are colour-coded, the achievements and failures of development at the grassroots over



the past 30 years leap out of the page. The problem then, is to figure out what to do about them.

The book was released recently without much fanfare, but deserves much more attention than it has hitherto been given. The study team was lead by ICIMOD's Basanta Shrestha and Rabi Prasad Kayastha of CBS, and used geographical information system techniques to produce the thematic maps that represent trends to enable rapid and visual grasp of the implications for the country of individual development parameters. The book will soon be followed by a CD-ROM that will enable planners and local

development officials to segregate the data by thematic areas, districts and timeline.

Starting from relatively straightforward mapping of district-wise trends in population density, the atlas shows us how fast the tarai is being filled. The eastern tarai, for instance, used to have a population density of 200-400 per sq km. By 2001, that figure had jumped to 400-800 per sq km. Kathmandu Valley's density has now crossed the 800 per sq km mark.

The average population growth rate used to be above 4 percent in the eastern tarai in the 1970s. Today it is at an average of 2.5 percent despite migration-related growth. Ilam even shows less than 2 percent population growth and, correlating this with the trends in progress in female literacy, it becomes clear why this is so.

Sex ratio (the number of males for every 100 females) is an important indicator of the status of women within a society. This atlas shows a clear correlation between gender equity and other parameters such as girl's literacy, maternal mortality and fertility rates. It is clear that the worst sex ratio is in the east-central tarai districts of Rautahat, Sarlahi and Mahottari where the number of males for every 100 females has remained above 105 since 1971. The second worst are the Midwestern districts of Achham, Bajura, Bajhang and Dailekh.

The mean age of marriage of women shows that in the eastern hills, Mustang and Manang are far ahead of the rest of the country with 22 years or above. But girls are still getting married at ages between 16-18 in the east-central tarai and the midwestern hills and this mean age hasn't improved much.

Female literacy rates show the most sluggish progress in the midwestern and far-western hills and east-central tarai in the past 30 years, and hint at the neglect of development that has contributed to the rise of the insurgency. Similarly, the midwestern hills show the least progress in enrollment in schools.

(Kunda Dixit)

Wild about bamboo

Nepali bamboo is good enough to eat

SRADDHA BASNYAT

It is said Nepali culture demands bamboo from birth to death and everything in between. We use bamboo as scaffolding material, as food, for music, to carry things and to write with. Nepal has over 50 species of bamboo. Another 10 species are in the process of being classified. Most Nepali bamboo types are found in the wetter middle and eastern regions of Nepal from 50m-4,000m, with Ilam, Dhankuta, Bhojpur and Taplejung having the sturdiest stems.

This is great diversity for country our size, says our foremost expert on this woody grass, Annapurna Das. "Nepal has up to five percent of the world's bamboo population, within only 0.1 percent of the world's land area," says Das, who is the only Nepali with a PhD in bamboo.

Another of Nepal's foremost experts on the plant is Shyam K Paudel, who is based in Beijing with the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR). A forester by training, Paudel has been in China since 2002, looking at bamboo's potential for rural enterprise and poverty alleviation. One hectare of bamboo can earn a farmer up to Rs 400,000 annually, says Paudel, adding: "Bamboo is a natural tool that encourages sustainable, integrated farming systems and is an excellent resource for income and employment generation." The beauty of bamboo is that it is fast-growing, needs little maintenance, can grow on forest margins and requires only modest investment.

Some communities in Nepal, like the Dom Dalits in the tarai who number only 20,000, are completely dependant on the bamboo, making their living from weaving mats from *nigalo*. Many Rai and Limbu communities in the east also rely on bamboo, and are expert weavers of *doko* and *dalo* for the local market.

Bamboo has finally been recognised as an 'international commodity' and is now under the purview of the International Commodity Body. And international conference in New Delhi next week will be looking at expanding bamboo trade. "Nepal can be a key player in the international bamboo and cane trade which averages \$6 billion annually," Paudel says.

In terms of quality, Nepali bamboo is as good as, if not better than most. And we are still finding new uses for this versatile plant. For instance, bamboo is the best 'carbon sink' for greenhouse gases putting out 35 percent more oxygen than other trees and every hectare of bamboo soaks up 12 tons of carbon dioxide every year. "We should all consider living in a bamboo jungle," Das says, and he doesn't seem to be joking.

Food

For the Japanese, Taiwanese, Chinese, Thai, and Nepalis bamboo shoots are a staple diet. Nepal produces 102 tons of *tama* and each household consumes about 46 stems a year. It is a good source of fibre, carbohydrate, vegetable fat, protein and vitamin B.

Timber

Strong but flexible and incredibly versatile, bamboo is an excellent alternative to wood. With a tensile strength of 28,000 per square inch, it's even a stronger building material than steel. "Harvestable in three years for building, bamboo homes only need an eighth of the energy concrete requires to create building material with the same capacity," marvels Paudel. To top it off, it is also the quickest growing plant in the world, growing 30 percent quicker than the fastest growing tree. This capacity to regenerate and its yields,



which can be up to 25 times more than timber when well managed makes bamboo an environmentally sound choice. Bamboo homes, light and elastic, are also earthquake resistant.

Green

In a country as vertical as Nepal, bamboo is also great for soil conservation. Growing in mixed cultures, it is naturally less likely to cause soil erosion than monocultural farming. "Bamboo creates a mat-like structure underground, effectively stitching the soil together, it is perfect for fragile river banks, deforested areas, earthquake zones and preventing mud slides," says Das.

Paper

Bamboo has been used for making paper since the 2nd century. At one point, this renewable resource was used to make 70 per cent of India's paper.

Medicine

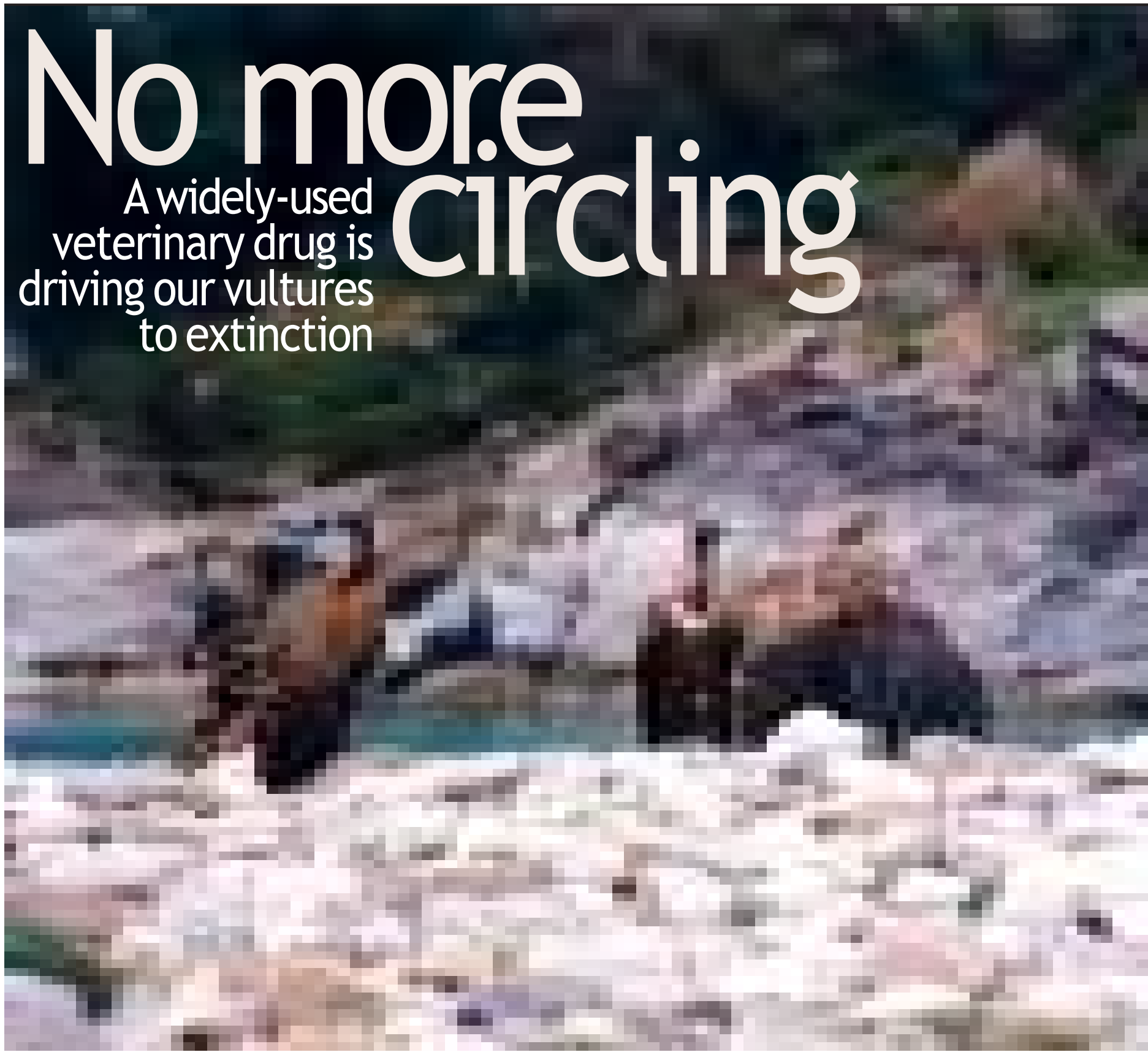
Ancient Ayurvedic and Chinese healing traditions have used the medicinal properties of bamboo. In acupuncture, bamboo secretion is powdered and hardened and used internally to treat asthma, coughs and as an aphrodisiac. Black bamboo root is used to treat kidney disease. In Ayurveda, bamboo manna is a rejuvenating herb for sore throats.

A case in point

When Himalayan Bamboo and Wood Products went into business two years ago, the Nepali owned company didn't know it would grow so fast. Roshan G Shrestha looked after sales, and says: "Nepali bamboo has good hardness, yet is flexible. It has better in quality than many Chinese bamboos so we can compete quality wise." The company sources bamboo from local farmers in Ilam and Dhankuta. Up to 50,000 pieces a month are transported to the factory in Hetauda where Himalayan Bamboo employs 150 Nepali workers, exclusive of the indirect employment created through cultivation, harvest, primary processing and transport. But it faces challenges: "Cost of production is still very high: factor in transportation from Ilam to Hetauda and the Rs 4,000 per truck in arbitrary 'local development tax'."

The business enjoys no government subsidies, incentives or technical support. The miracle is that the company has managed to turn this miracle crop into a great export for the country.

The 7th World Bamboo Congress will be held
27 February-4 March, 2004 at New Delhi
www.worldbambocongress.com



BIRD CONSERVATION NEPAL

SAMUEL THOMAS

The trouble with a scavenger species is that even when it is on the verge of extinction no one wants to save it. Vultures have this problem.

Four years ago, vultures suddenly started disappearing over the subcontinent. No one knew why: some suspected pesticides, others thought the birds were running out of food. Whatever it was, three species of vultures were vanishing. Other kinds of vultures and secondary scavengers did not seem to be affected.

Even as researchers investigated the mystery in India, Pakistan and Nepal, they noticed a catastrophic decrease in vulture numbers. Populations of the Oriental White-backed Vulture, Slender-billed Vulture and Long-billed Vulture in the three countries dropped by between 95-97 percent. Considering that the Oriental White-backed Vulture had been considered one of the most abundant large raptors in the world, such population declines had never been seen since

the extinction of the Great Auk or the Passenger Pigeon in the 19th century.

Soon, researchers zeroed in on the cause. Analysing the remains of dead vultures in Punjab and Nepal, scientists from the US-based Peregrine Fund found that the vultures were dying because of the presence of diclofenac in livestock carcasses, an anti-inflammatory drug used widely in human and veterinary medicine in South Asia. Lindsay Oaks of Washington State University said he and other researchers were puzzled by the fact that the vultures were dying of kidney failure, and soon they narrowed it to residual diclofenac. Three species of vultures are hypersensitive to the drug that they ingest from dead animals leading to renal failure, avian visceral gout and death.

Oaks and his fellow researchers met with government officials and conservationists from India, Pakistan and Nepal at a 'vulture summit' in Kathmandu last month to present the findings and decide what to do. They agreed on a 'Kathmandu Declaration' under which

the delegations of the three countries agreed that immediate steps were necessary. Narayan Poudel of Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) has said the government will assist captive breeding efforts and seek a ban on the use of the drug in Nepal. The conservation group, Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), is currently negotiating with the government for land near Chitwan to build the centre. Two other range countries, Bangladesh and Bhutan, were not present at the meeting but have expressed their willingness to act upon the recommendations.

In Nepal, the Oriental White-backed Vulture and the Slender-billed Vulture are found mostly in the tarai, churia and lower reaches of the mid-mountains. Nepal also hosts the Himalayan Griffon, the Eurasian Griffon, the Lammergeier, the Egyptian Vulture and the Cinerous Vulture. The Nepal Vulture Study, a partnership of The Peregrine Fund and BCN, is now looking into whether the declines are also affecting the Himalayan Griffon Vultures.

In Koshi Tappu, the decline in the last few years has been catastrophic. In 2000, there were 67 breeding pairs of nesting vultures. This number dropped to three breeding pairs this year, according to BCN. Villagers living near Milke Danda in eastern Nepal say the Lammergeier has all but disappeared from cliffs that were regular dwelling sites. An IUCN staff member from Pokhara recalls: "As children we'd see large flocks of vultures feeding on the carcasses of mules from the Jomsom trail. The birds



would get so fat, they could hardly fly. The place is still the same but the vultures aren't there any more."

Because of the country's other pressing concerns, conservation is taking a backseat, making the job of launching a campaign to save vultures difficult. Conservationists say officials need to understand the importance of these birds to ecosystem integrity, livelihoods and public health. Vultures have long been the most effective natural scavengers in our environment. They quickly dispose of the remains of diseased and old animals. They



PEREGRINE FUND





remain unaffected and prevent catastrophic animal and human disease epidemics from spreading. Bone pickers depended on these birds for other reasons: after the hide collectors were done with skinning the dead animals, they waited for vultures to pick the animals to the bone (a flock can clean a carcass in a few minutes).

In India, this is reportedly affecting the livelihoods of Dalit families who depended on these birds to clean the carcasses before they collected the bones to make bone meal and glue. The concern, then, lies with the loss of biodiversity (the extinction crisis) and also the potential impact on ecosystem integrity, livelihood security and public health (human and ecosystem well-being).



Dr Lindsay Oaks examines a dead vulture



Himalayan Griffon



White-backed Vulture



Slender-billed Vulture



BIRDS OF NEPAL

In Kosi Tappu the drop in breeding pairs of the White-backed Vulture means potential disaster. The reserve's ungulate population, including of the last remnant population of Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo (*arua*) and a large domestic livestock population would be felled by contagion if it weren't for effective scavenging.

At the Kathmandu vulture summit, everyone agreed that banning or severely restricting the use of diclofenac should be the first step. This should go hand-in-hand with a captive breeding programme for release and relocation of the Oriental White-backed Vulture, Slender-billed Vulture and Long-billed Vulture.

It is hard to tell people to save the vulture. They are unglamorous birds that people speak for only at the risk of being accused of having a taste for the bizarre. Surely they do not inspire conservation efforts like charismatic mammals. That is the cruelty of beauty. But for as long as humans have been around vultures were there to clean up, in life and in death.

Says Hem Baral of BCN: "Time is running out for the vultures, and if we are to save these magnificent jewels of our skies we must act soon. We have only months, not years." ●

Bird Conservation Nepal is seeking help with monitoring nesting sites and information on vulture declines. Call: 01-4439296, 01-4417805.

DEAD HOUSE

Dead House

DEAD MUSIC CENTER

Opening Hours

10:00 am - 8:00 pm

Address: P.O. Box 1111, Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone: 01-4439296, 01-4417805

Woolenwear

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Travel advice to those making ritualised pilgrimages on well-trodden paths

Lighten up



KUNDA DIXIT

As another Season begins, bringing with it gabby young debutantes repeating the same grizzled conversations echoing older travellers, many of us are terribly aware of the irony of these Journeys as Discoveries. In fact, they are ritualised pilgrimages on well-trodden paths. These trips widen the trails they follow, making the places along the way a little more in this fetishised image that combines fear and revelation, paranoia and déjà vu. To these travellers who are nevertheless wanted, to those old hands who nevertheless give advice and to those natives who nevertheless roll their eyes and mutter, I say “lighten up” and offer Joesph Brodsky.

An Admonition

I
Trekking in Asia, spending nights in odd dwellings, in granaries, cabins, shacks—timber abodes whose thin squined windowpanes harness the world—sleep dressed, wrapped in your sheepskin and do your best always to tuck your head into the corner, as in the corner it’s harder—and in darkness at that—to swing an axe over your heavy, booze-laden gourd and to chop it off nicely. Square the circle, in short.

II
Fear broad cheekbones (including the moon’s), pockmarked

skin, and prefer blue eyes to brown eyes. Search hard for the blue ones, especially when the road takes you into the wood, into its heart. On the whole, as for eyes, one should watch for their cut. For at last instant it’s better to stare at that which, though cold, permits seeing through: ice may crack, yet wallowing in an ice hole is far better than in honey-like, viscous lies.

III
Always pick a house with baby clothes hanging out in the yard. Deal only with the over-fifty crowd: a hick at that age knows too much about fate to gain anything by attempting to bust your brain; same thing, a squaw. Hide the money in your fur coat’s collar or, if you are travelling light, in your brown culottes under the knee—but not in your boots since they’ll find the dough easily there. In Asia, boots are the first to go.

IV
In the mountains, move slowly. If you must creep, then creep. Magnificent in the distance, meaningless closer up, mountains are but a surface standing on end. The snail-like and, it seems, horizontal meandering trail is, in fact, vertical. Lying flat in the mountains, you stand. Standing up, you lie flat. Which suggests your true freedom’s in falling down. That’s the way, it appears,

to conquer, once in mountains, vertigo, raptures, fears.

V
If somebody yells “Hey, stranger!” don’t answer. Play deaf and dumb. Even though you may know it, don’t speak the tongue. Try not to stand out—either in profile or full face; simply don’t wash your face at times. What’s more, when they rip a cur’s throat with a swa, don’t cringe. Smoking, douse your butts with spittle. And besides, arrange to wear gray—the hue of the earth—especially underclothes, to reduce the temptation to blend with your flesh the earth.

VI
When you halt in the desert, make an arrow from pebbles, so, if suddenly woken up, you’ll fathom which way to go in the darkness. At nights, demons in deserts try travellers’ hearts. He who heeds their cry gets easily disoriented: one step sideways and—well, *c’est tout*. Ghosts, specters, demons, are at home in the desert. You too will discover that’s true when, sand creaking under your sole, all that remains of you is your soul.

VII
Nobody ever knows anything for a fact. Gazing ahead at your stooping guide’s sturdy back, think that you gaze at the future and keep your distance (if that is possible) from him. Since, in principle, life is itself but a distance between here and there, and quickening the pace only pays when you discern the sound behind of those running after you down the path with lowered heads—be they murderers, thieves, the past.

VIII
In the sour whiff of rugs, in the burnt dung’s fume, prize the indifference of things to being regarded from afar, and in turn lose your own silhouette, turning, thus, unattainable to binoculars, gendarmes, mass. Coughing in a cloud of dust, wading through mud, muck, map—What difference does it make how you would look close up? It’s even better if some character with a blade figures out you are a stranger a bit too late.

IX
Rivers in Asia are longer than elsewhere, more rich in alluvium—that is, murkier. As you reach for a mouthful, your cupped fingers ladle silt, and one who has drunk this water would prefer it spilt. Never trust its reflection. Crossing it, cross it on a raft built with no other hands but the pair you own. Know that the gleam of a campfire, your nightly bliss, will, by sliding downstream, betray you to enemies.

X
In your letter from these parts, don’t divulge whom and what you’ve seen on your way. If anything should be penned, use your varying feelings, musings, regrets, et al.: a letter can be intercepted. And after all, the movement of a pen across paper is, in itself, the worsening of the break between you and those with whom you won’t any longer sit or lie down—with whom, unlike the letter, you won’t share—who cares why—a home.

XI
When you stand on an empty stony plateau alone under the fathomless dome of Asia in whose blueness an airplane or an angel sometimes whips up its starch or star—when you shudder at how infinitesimally small you are, remember: space that appears to need nothing does crave, as a matter of fact, an outside gaze, a criterion of emptiness—of its depth and scope. And it’s only you who can do the job.

Also published as ‘Advice to a Traveller’.
Translated by the author and George L Klein.



(OECD), household saving rates declined between 1984 and 2001 in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

One might think that, with declining birthrates in rich countries in recent decades, it should be easy to save more. Fewer children mean fewer expenses and adults can work longer to earn extra income beyond their immediate needs. So why have so many different countries experienced a decline in savings? The

ANALYSIS
Robert J Shiller



answer must be that people do not decide whether to increase their savings on the basis of careful calculations about their future needs.

A study in 2000 of saving rates in 150 countries, headed by Norman Loayza at the World Bank, found that some basic economic factors explained much of the variation in national saving rates, without any reference to cultural differences. Surprisingly, the study found that saving rates tend to be high when inflation is high, and to decline when inflation declines. Since inflation has been declining in most countries of the world over the last 20 years or so, this could help explain the global decline in saving rates.

Loayza and his colleagues thought that inflation encourages saving because it creates an atmosphere of uncertainty. When people see high inflation, they conclude that the economy is precarious, so perhaps they should tighten their belts. Thus, inflation serves as a visceral reminder to save, while old age seems too far away for most people to think about.

There is another reason why the high

inflation of the past encouraged saving: the high interest rates that tend to accompany rapid price growth. Borrowers may be forced to “save” more by paying higher mortgage rates. Consider the US in 1980, when the personal saving rate was 11 percent. The inflation rate was 12 percent and 30-year fixed-rate home mortgages were over 15 percent. This effectively forced some households to reduce their consumption expenditures drastically, contributing to the high saving rate of the time. When inflation fell, people eventually refinanced their mortgages at lower rates, breathed a sigh of relief and started spending more.

Finally, declining saving rates around the world reflect strong growth in asset markets—namely, stocks and real estate—over the last 20 years. We value our assets more because we imagine that they will be in great demand in the future. For most people, the troubles caused by the old-age crisis seem remote, while booming share or housing prices look concrete in brokerage statements or on the business pages of newspapers. People feel richer and save less.

The problem is that these increases in value create the impression that our lack of saving for the last decade has had no serious consequences. We think we’re still getting richer even though we save less. But since speculative prices are ultimately determined by psychology, they can also suddenly be deflated by psychology. Unless we come to terms with the lethal combination of declining saving rates and falling birthrates, many more people may retire poor than we ever imagined. ●

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Robert J Shiller is Professor of Economics at Yale University, and author of *Irrational Exuberance* and *The New Financial Order: Risk in the 21st Century*.

Don't retire poor

We think we're getting richer though we save less

Around the world, social security and health care are today's hottest economic issues due to the rising dependency ratio: the proportion of elderly people relative to younger, economically active, workers. According to the Population Resource Center, this ratio will double in the world's more developed regions and triple in less developed regions by 2050. With so

many more old people in coming decades, governments will be hard pressed to raise enough money to pay for their needs by taxing the young.

Why aren't people saving more for their future retirement? Why are they actually doing the opposite by saving less? According to a recent study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

EU mission to Mars

The European Space Agency (ESA) has announced plans to send the first manned mission to Mars by 2033. It faces three decades of hard work in creating crucial life-support technologies to meet that goal. The agency has a detailed timeline that must be followed if it is to send a human crew to “red planet”, said Dietrich Vennemann, ESA research director in charge of manned missions. The agency's Mars research forms part of the Aurora program, introduced in 2001 by the European Union for exploration of the Solar System. The calendar for sending

humans to Mars begins in 2007, with a mission aimed at testing technology for a spaceship's high-speed re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.

In 2009, if ESA is able to achieve satisfactory velocities, it will send a first ship to Mars for biological research, to collect mineral and gas samples in order to determine the presence of life, past or present. Those samples would return to Earth between 2011 and 2014. By 2014, ESA plans to test technologies to support manned missions, such as respiratory systems for the astronauts and protection

against solar radiation. From 2014 to 2018 it will test solar energy propulsion, controlled landings and orbits. Vennemann noted that the atmosphere of Mars is mainly carbon dioxide, which humans cannot breathe, and that solar radiation is much greater on the red planet than it is on Earth. Furthermore, the manned space missions in the past 40 years have lasted no more than 400 days. “A manned mission to Mars would probably last a thousand days. That means we have to work hard to create technical supports” for survival in outer space, he said.

As for the cost of a manned Mars mission, Franco Ongaro, director of the Aurora program, said it would be a good investment for Europe, representing less than a dollar a year per person. He assures that the European space research is not for military purposes. “I can't think of any military uses for this research. On the contrary, the experience of the past 30 years proves that studying the universe has created a feeling of gregariousness in humanity, an inclination towards peace,” he said. He also ruled out that Europe is competing with the US, which announced its own manned mission to Mars, to take place sometime after 2020. ●

(IPS)



Grim reaper

AIDS in the fastest growing epidemic in eastern Europe

Eastern Europe is seeing the fastest growing AIDS epidemic in the world, studies by UN agencies show. Across eastern Europe and the central Asian republics, the number of AIDS cases has grown from 30,000 in 1995 to 1.5 million, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO)—a 50-fold increase in eight years.

The WHO and other UN agencies like UNAIDS and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) highlighted the spread of AIDS in Europe at a two-day conference in Dublin, Ireland. “In western Europe the incidence has risen to between half a million and 600,000 cases,” says Gudjon Magnusson of the WHO. The numbers are still small compared to the worldwide incidence of an estimated 40 million cases, with about 27 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa. But eastern Europe and the central Asian republics are of major concern because the number of cases rising so rapidly. Eighty percent of infected people in this region are below 30 years of age. Seventy percent are believed to have contracted AIDS through infecting needles while taking drugs.

Across western Europe two-thirds of all infections are through heterosexual sex. The Dublin conference sought to get political leadership in these countries to take strong action to stop the spread of infection and to treat infected people. “Of all the social and political challenges facing an expanded European Union, AIDS is one of the greatest, requiring determined and sustained action now,” said UNAIDS executive director Peter Piot. The conference statement warns that a large portion of the youth in eastern European and the central Asian republics countries engage in unsafe sex. The percentage of people reporting premarital sexual relations more than doubled between 1993 and 1999, from 9 percent to 22 percent.

In addition to increased AIDS funding from national governments, the World Bank and European Union, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has approved more than \$400 million over five years for 22 programs in 16 countries in eastern Europe and central Asia. ● (IPS)

(Sanjay Suri)



Drop the bomb

A better way to reduce nuclear risks

In 1977, when I served in President Jimmy Carter's State Department, I was sent to India to dissuade that country's leaders from developing a nuclear bomb. My hosts replied that they needed to keep up with China. I said that

ANALYSIS
Joseph S Nye



Pakistan would inevitably follow suit and the world would become less safe.

India promised that it would not export its weapons technology. So far as we know, its leaders have kept their word. But revelations about the nuclear weapons smuggling network organised by AQ Khan, the father of Pakistan's bomb, confirm the danger

I predicted back then. Some call Khan's network an effort to spread an "Islamic bomb", but given that North Korea was on the list of recipients along with Libya and Iran, it might better be termed a corrupt bomb.

As events in Pakistan illustrate, the spread of nuclear technology does not extend the stability that comes with mutual deterrence. Rather, it increases the prospects of corrupt leakage that may allow terrorist groups access to nuclear weapons. That makes everyone less safe. Any pathological group of extremists could destroy New Delhi, Tokyo, Paris or any city they chose.

Now the world's attention is focussed on Iran, one recipient of Pakistani technology, as the country

seemingly keenest to create its own nuclear arsenal. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran began enriching uranium at a pilot centrifuge plant last August and is constructing larger underground enrichment facilities.

Iran proclaims that its programs are for peaceful generation of nuclear energy, but inspectors have already found traces of highly enriched weapons-grade uranium. Last October, Mohamed El Baradei, the head of the IAEA, announced that Iran had accepted enhanced inspection procedures. In addition, after visits by the French, British and German foreign ministers, Iran announced a temporary suspension of its enrichment program. Now it hints that it may resume enrichment,

and recent press reports about the imports from Pakistan suggest Iran failed to disclose everything to the IAEA.

Iran claims that as a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, it has the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. Correct, because the NPT was born with a loophole. Even if a country agrees to broad ranging IAEA inspections, it can legally accumulate enriched uranium (or reprocessed plutonium) under the guise of a peaceful energy program, and then suddenly declare that circumstances have changed and withdraw from the treaty—with the ability to produce nuclear weapons on short notice.

If Iran did this, it would not only add to the dangers in an unstable region, but would likely begin a process of unravelling the non-proliferation regime worldwide. Iran may ask what right others have to demand that it forego nuclear weapons. The answer lies both in the fact that it promised not to do so when it signed the NPT and in the consequences that it would impose on others.

For these reasons, President Bush declared an Iranian nuclear weapon unacceptable. However, America's unilateral options are limited. Not only is the US military busy trying in Iraq, but the way the US went into Iraq—which proved to have fewer nuclear capabilities than Iran—undermined American credibility, making it difficult to recruit allies to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Fortunately, there is a multilateral option and an existing precedent. In the mid-1970s, many parties to the NPT planned to import and develop enrichment and reprocessing facilities. Realising the threat to the non-proliferation regime, countries as diverse as the Soviet Union, France, Germany and Japan formed a "Nuclear Suppliers Group" that

restrained the export of enrichment and reprocessing facilities. That plugged part of the loophole in the treaty without amending it.

Today, such countries should join together to offer Iran (and others) a deal. Countries that wish to develop nuclear energy but not nuclear bombs should be given international guarantees of fuel supply and disposal of spent fuel. For example, Russia, which is helping Iran construct a nuclear reactor at Bushehr, should offer Iran a guarantee of low enriched uranium fuel and reprocessing of the reactor's spent fuel by sending it back to Russia if Iran agrees to forego enrichment and reprocessing. This deal could then be given teeth by the UN Security Council.

The Council would declare that further proliferation of nuclear weapons is a threat to peace and that any country moving in that direction is subject to sanctions. Such a resolution would also include a carrot by guaranteeing Iran access to the non-dangerous parts of the nuclear energy fuel cycle. The pot could be further sweetened by offers to relax existing sanctions and provide a security guarantee if Iran remains non-nuclear.

European foreign ministers have already expressed their concerns about Iran's nuclear program. Russia indicates that it is willing to provide such fuel services. It is time for the Security Council to try to internationalise the most dangerous parts of the nuclear fuel cycle. It is not too late to learn the lessons of the misadventures of AQ Khan. ●

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Joseph Nye, Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and a former US Assistant Secretary of Defence, is author of the forthcoming book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.



Target: Islamic schools

As the violence in Thailand's south threatens to spiral out of control, the government has cracked down on Islamic schools in the region. This action against 'pondoks', the Islamic schools, stems from a theory that they are a "breeding ground for Islamic militants" and hence the only solution is to either reform them by having them join the education mainstream or close them. Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is among those pushing for the latter. And the Thai army also agrees. A military source was quoted in the *Bangkok Post* saying: "Southern insurgents and their allies commanded more than 3,000 mostly teenage followers who were given weapons and guerrilla warfare training in the past two years."

Currently there are some 550 'pondoks', 300 of which offer an Islamic education while the rest use the dual curriculum of religious and secular lessons. But this clampdown on the religious schools has given rise to a tide of concern, particularly in the wake of the confusing messages from the government about who the actual perpetrators of the violence are. Since the 4 January attack by assailants on a major military camp in the south where four soldiers were killed and over 300 weapons were stolen, senior military officials and government ministers have been floating a number of theories to explain the attacks. The list of new suspects appeared to keep pace with the increasing frequency of the violence, which has resulted in 42 deaths. This spurt of unrest has also resulted in injuries to 23 people and the torching of public buildings and schools. The death toll over the past seven weeks in the Muslim south is much higher than the estimated 50 deaths of government and security officials over the past three years. ● (IPS)

Meagre contributions

Community development groups are dismayed that the Australian government will only contribute \$6.6 million a year to a global fund to combat HIV, malaria and tuberculosis. Many say this poor commitment shows that Australia is shirking from its responsibility to help counter the growing health crisis.

Oxfam/Community Aid Abroad and Medicines Sans Frontieres Australia calculated that Australia, based on its GNP and position on the National Development Index, should contribute \$70 million over a three-year period. While countries such as France and the United States made major funding commitments to support the Swiss-based Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Australia held back. Attempting to ensure the fund reaches its target \$1.5 billion this year, executive director Dr Richard Feachem visited Australia last week and met with Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer. Feachem hopes to raise \$500 million for this year—one-third of its total budget—from Japan, Canada, Australia and the oil-rich countries.

However on 18 February, Downer announced that the Australian government would only commit \$20 million over a three-year period. Acknowledging the contribution was relatively small, Downer pointed out Australian aid funding of HIV programs within the region of \$160 million over six years.

Since its launch two years ago, the global fund has committed \$1 billion to the Asia Pacific region, representing 20 percent of its resources, and has spent



more than double what the total Australian government overseas aid development program on HIV in the region is in half the time.

Earlier in February while visiting Australia, World Bank President James Wolfensohn complained of the staggering inequities between spending on global military expenditure and development programs. The Australian Greens spokeswoman on health, Kerry Nettle agrees, saying "The global threat of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria is impossible to overstate and yet a government that is willing to waste over \$800 million supporting an illegal invasion of Iraq can only find \$6.3 million a year to address (these diseases)." ●

(IPS)

(Bob Burton)

Giving microcredit its due



Last week's microcredit summit in Dhaka showed how small loans to women can transform society

JOHAN MIKAELSSON

The microfinance revolution started by rural women in Bangladesh in the 1970s proved we were wrong to believe that poverty and a lack of collateral

COMMENT
Phrang Roy



meant that poor people were not creditworthy. When rural women were given the opportunity they proved poor people were efficient users of credit.

In Bangladesh, for example, women involved in microfinance not only changed the way they managed household incomes, they no longer believe they should be dependent or that they should remain confined to the home.

They are also more likely to send their daughters to school.

Women's status, both in their homes and communities improve when they are responsible for loans and for managing savings. When they generate and control their own income, women gain a level of power that means they can make decisions independently and command more respect.

Poor women often have the best credit ratings. In Bangladesh, women default on loans less often than men, and credit extended to women has a much greater impact on household consumption and quality of life for children. But women across South Asia have been excluded

from the market economy.

To be sure, the experience with microfinance is not universally positive. Nor can it be suggested that microfinance alone is responsible for change. In Bangladesh, the rapid growth of the garment manufacturing industry, which employs mainly women, and the activities of women's rights advocacy groups and movements have also had an impact. Nevertheless, microfinance has drawn millions of women into commercial economic activities for the first time, enabling them to take advantage of new opportunities and develop new roles as cash income earners and economically active members of the community.

In its early days, the microfinance revolution focused on lending. Loans were typically secured through the mutual guarantee of solidarity groups. The microcredit model pioneered by the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh has now been replicated all over the world. While a minimum amount of savings was generally required before a loan was granted, initially less emphasis was placed on creating flexible and voluntary savings schemes that could be directly controlled by the group members.

The Millennium Development Goal to promote gender equality is key to achieving the target of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Women's microfinance groups can and should also be strategic agents for achieving these goals. ●

The author is with the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD.

GCC boom

Buoyed by the highest oil prices in years, the six countries comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are reaching some of the world's highest growth records, but they might not be able to sustain the momentum. The average growth estimate for 2003 in the GCC countries was 4.5 percent, much higher than the average in Europe or the United States of about 2.8 percent, according to figures released by the various Arab and international sources. The figures were released before 2004 and actual figures, to be released in the coming months, may differ from the estimates.

Of the six countries—United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia—Qatar showed a whopping growth rate of 8.4 percent because of massive natural gas exploration projects. Much of the increase in the GCC growth is due to spiking oil prices. With an average barrel of crude oil costing about \$28 on the world market, the GCC countries have rarely been this rich.

According to figures released by the Centre for Global Energy Studies, the six GCC countries were expected to have earned \$134 billion in oil revenue last year, an increase of 30 percent just compared to the previous year. The biggest earner among the GCC countries has traditionally been Saudi Arabia, with the UAE and Kuwait running distant second and third. But higher oil prices are hard to sustain. Even Saudi officials have said they believe that the Oil Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) should bring down its oil prices to at least \$25 a barrel. Non-OPEC exporters will likely follow suit.



Aside from declining oil revenue, the GCC countries have other problems that, unless addressed, could have adverse effects on their economies. One is the continued overspending in defence. In 2002, the last year for which official figures were readily available, GCC countries spent \$37 billion on arms purchases and other military expenditures. For the past two years, the six countries have on average spent 30 percent of their annual budget on defence, the highest percentage in the world.

Combined with expected decline in the oil revenue and sustaining defence spending, some GCC countries, most notably Saudi Arabia, are finding it hard to cope with high rates of population growth. As a conservative Muslim country that does not advocate population control, it has a population growth rate of about 3.4 percent a year. Perhaps most relevant to whether the GCC countries can maintain their economic growth is whether they can forego the changes needed to diversify their economic infrastructure from one solely based on oil.

Many economists argue that a couple of the GCC countries that have tried are shaping up to be the model for the rest. Although the UAE's 2003 economic growth is expected to have been around 4.5 percent, the non-oil sector's growth for last year is estimated at 11 percent. Much of the UAE's non-oil sector growth is due to construction and tourism. For the first time, the UAE last year earned more from tourism, about 20 percent of its overall revenue, than it did from oil exports. Qatar and Bahrain have undertaken large-scale natural gas exploration projects that have suddenly added billions of dollars to their proven wealth, and as a result have allowed their governments to increase public spending that in turn has contributed to economic growth. ● (IPS)





Hisila Yami (r) with her husband, Baburam Bhattarai

Girl power

Maoist leader Hisila Yami in Kantipur, 23 February

कान्तिपुर

Now that the royal army has decided to recruit female soldiers, the idea has become a matter for discussion. The move came after the 'People's War' became a national issue and a threat to the old regime. The first reason for the army's recruitment is to arrest the increasing participation of women in the people's war. The second is to use the ladies as a lure to control committed Maoist fighters and to either distract them from their mission or make them surrender. The third is to provide employment to women of the families who are against this and have been displaced from their villages. The fourth is in line with the global practice of having women in the army.

Women are not forced into the People's Liberation Army. They don't join for any practical or short-term reasons. The fact is the women make the biggest segment of the population in downtrodden communities. They are found in every family, house, community, region, religion and language.

Where there is oppression, there will be revolt. Since women have suffered class and sexual oppression, they have double the capacity to revolt. This why the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) recruited them. After our third expanded meeting nine years ago, we made it mandatory to have two women in each of our fighting, security and volunteer teams. Unlike the royal army's scheme to attract females with money, position and facilities, our women are recruited on the basis principles and ideals.

They were introduced to reality: women are the most deprived in the existing feudal system, despite their vital role in Nepal's agro-economy. They are denied parental property although they run their households on their own when their husbands are away earning money. When the men return, they marry other women and the wives are forced to leave. Under such circumstances, when these women marry someone else, they become outcasts. This is how the feudal system protects criminals and victimises those already made victims. The CPN (Maoist) is reversing this feudal practice through its people's war.

It is leading the new revolution to implement ideas like equal rights for parental property and tillers as landowners. Women are fascinated with this change. The people's war has liberated women who otherwise had to spend their lives solely on domestic matters. Because of Hindu philosophy, girls are married off at an early age. They become grandmothers even before they reach menopause.

The people's war has brought women out of that vicious cycle of living as a reproductive machine. The movement has taken them to different parts of the country. Rural women, who were once deprived of their rights, are now at the forefront of the people's war, fighting as commanders. Now, women are deciding not only when they live but also when they die.

Female participation is increasing in the People's Liberation Army. Their numbers are growing also because of repression and the physical violations of the so-called Armed Police Force and the royal army. Women who join the people's war are not only from the general mass but also from other political parties. In such a situation, the condition of women in the royal army will be counterproductive.

Child soldiers

Jhalak Gaire in Nepal Samacharpatra, 23 February

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

The Maoists have intensified their campaign to train child soldiers in their strongholds in midwestern Nepal. A highly placed Maoist source said secondary and higher secondary students in many villages are being trained in secret camps. In line with the decision of their high command, the rebels' target is to have 50,000 child soldiers by April. A senior leader of the party indicated that the latest abduction of students from Achham and Rolpa was for this purpose.

Called the Special Peoples' Military Campaign, it is being run in what the rebels call 'model districts' in the remote Jumla and Jajarkot, areas where state power is almost non-existent. In the last month, 15,000 recruits are said to have completed basic training. The trainings have three phases and are being conducted in 'base', 'model' and 'special' areas controlled by the Maoists.

While the core Maoists and their student members are all out to train more children, locals are fleeing their villages from fear of having to join the Maoist recruitment drive. Nim Bahadur Rawal left Dailekh and is now in Gujarat. When he arrived in Nepalganj, he reported that the rebels were training all school students to use rifles. "The Maoists said all school students need to know how to use guns, or else the army will gun all of us down," he said. "We were lucky because we could get away. There are hundreds of students who have had to walk for more than a week to reach the training camps." The Bheri Karnali regional branch of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary), the student wing of the Maoists, says it has a new mission. According to Kamal



Shahi, regional coordinator, the Maoist student organisation is already in the process of strengthening itself both militarily and politically.

The multi-pronged approach comes in the wake of the military operation at Mudbhara in Doti district where some trainee students lost their lives. "That is why we have began this training campaign under the campaign 'one educational institution, one reformed militia'," says Shahi, who is also a member of the central secretariat of the ANNFSU (R). He claimed his organisation has already created a military force equal to a battalion in a regular army. He said the Maoists would soon have 50,000 militia and 375,000 members.

Live through this

Rajidhani, 21 February

राजधानी

Karnali is not only the most affected war zone in Nepal but also has the worst record for women's rights. In the villages of Jumla, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Rukum and Dailekh districts, women spend most of their lives grazing cattle in the forests. They live in tents and sleep on the wet ground

without much food to eat.

"Our husbands beat us if we don't work hard," says Darima Shahi from Jumla. "If we are unable to do hard labour, we will be kicked out of the house and society will consider us a shame," says the 22-year-old who has worked as a shepherdess since she was a child. Life was so hard that she even lost her child during delivery. "We live like animals," says Jankala from Kalikot. Her parents forced her to spend all her time in the forest and never sent her to school, even though it was near her village. "My future is destroyed because all I know is how to graze cattle." She walks with her cattle and wanders from one district to another through the forests. Security is a major concern, not from the Maoists or the army but from wild animals. "Our only protection are our dogs," says another shepherdess.

More than 200,000 girls and women here have never seen the inside of a school building. Statistics show 70 percent of women can't count money or even differentiate between currency notes. "They are worse off than even prisoners," says Sita Singh, a school teacher from Kalikot. She adds that besides grazing animals, the women also walk long stretches with heavy loads. There is an urgent need for developing income generation programs for these underprivileged women.

Injustice

Rajidhani, 21 February

राजधानी

BAGLUNG - Dalits from Syaula village were recently beaten up and tortured by a group of Janmorcha party workers for allegedly supporting the Maoists. Among the victims were 50-year-old Dhan Bahadur BK, 14-year-old Sukmaya and one-year-old Chitmaya. According to a local resident who arrived at the Baglung district headquarters, two women, both above 50, were tied



Parents: Go carefully! The Maoists might take you!
Children: Stay safe! The Maoists might come for you!

राजधानी Rajidhani, 22 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"India cannot back off from the refugee issue,"

Tekhnath Rijal, Bhutanese refugee leader in Samacharpatra, February 24

up and locked up for more than six days. The political party has asked them to leave the village or suffer more punishment. After the incident, many dalit families have left Syaula and taken refuge in a neighbouring village. Some approached the Maoist activists for help and the rebels published a statement condemning the Janmorcha party for their unjust treatment. The local Maoist commander, Ashis Magar has said his group will take action against the activists and make them compensate the loss of property and physical torture of the victims.

No English

Rajdhani, 24 February
राजधानी
LALITPUR – It was Bhimkumari Magar’s most embarrassing moment when other women laughed at her inability to speak English properly at a workshop on women’s empowerment. It was a program for Nepalis, but everyone started introducing themselves in English for the benefit of their American facilitator. As Magar struggled to introduce herself in English, the elegant ladies taking part all burst into laughter. As it happens, Magar is a grassroots politician. The program, jointly organised by the American Centre and Kathmandu College of Management, brought together women participants from both urban areas and remote villages.

While the program presenter and facilitators spoke in English, rural women politicians with no English skills had to sit quietly through it all and try to figure out what was happening.

Army school

Drishti, 24 February -1 March
BAJURA – In Martadi village, students are forced to attend their class in a hospital room since the army took over their school to set up a barracks. Their school has now turned into a military camp surrounded by barbed wire. Their playground has trenches and landmines. Five hundred students are now crammed into the hospital. There isn’t room enough for most of them so they sit outside during classes. The chairs, desks and other materials have been scattered. At times, they have to bear the insults and the rude behaviour of doctors. There is no toilet, water, playground or school office. The hospital morgue is adjacent to a classroom. Due to lack of sufficient space in the hospital, the school sends many students to another school two km away. The school was promised compensation of Rs 2.2 million by the government through the Home Ministry. They haven’t seen any of it despite repeated visits to Singha Durbar by the teachers, CDO and school management committee.

Peace and disharmony

Political scientist Krishna Khanal in Deshantar, 15 February

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

An armed movement for a republic can never be successful. No matter how much the Maoists try, they will not be able to establish a republican state through violence. Even if it is established, there is no basis to believe that the system will be a people’s democracy. As long as the Maoists continue their armed rebellion, the monarchy will remain.

No present international power will tolerate a change of guard through arms in Nepal’s state power. But, if the movement advances toward republicanism through peaceful means, I see possibilities for it to succeed. People may ask how a republic can be ushered in peacefully if the king does not abdicate but history has examples of kings giving up as peaceful pressure mounts.

The Shah of Iran is a recent example. American political pundits called him a modernising monarch who commanded a strong military. Yet, when the people’s demand for change became overwhelming, he abandoned his throne and fled. The main issue in Nepal is what percent of the people really back republicanism. If the people genuinely want a republic, I see no reason for bloodshed.

The army cannot be separated from the people. The lower ranks of the army, who are

the actual fighters, come from poor backgrounds. This could prompt them to participate in a peaceful movement. At the very least, they will not favour suppressing such a movement if it were to gather strength.

Another important factor is the moral force of an unarmed movement, which is vital. It is natural to use force against someone who fights using arms. For instance, after the

Maoists resorted to arms, the government also used violence to quell the insurgency. Nobody viewed the countermove as unnatural. Today, we hear about Maoists dying almost everyday. Except for simple human curiosity, the news doesn’t arouse undue concern. This is because people believe the rebels chose to kill, and get killed themselves. But there is a great deal of concern when non-combatants and

unarmed people die at the hands of both the security force and the Maoists.

When a movement is peaceful, no one will be able to justify the use of arms against it. If one side were to do that, it would add fuel to the fire. The Maoists are still far away from their goal despite those who sacrificed their lives for their armed struggle. This is why I am convinced they will never be able to attain their goal through force. If the rebels give up their arms and join the peaceful movement, it will be easy to advance the republican cause. Therefore, the Maoists are the biggest obstacle in attaining their own goal.



Back at Sundarijal >55

One day in BP's life in jail



BP Koirala, imprisoned at the Police Training Centre in Kathmandu, describes the tediousness of his near-solitary confinement. He describes in excruciating detail his daily routine from the time he gets up in his cell to the time he goes to bed. It is a life he leads from hour to hour, being able to pass 60 minutes is itself an achievement. Life is slightly better than at Sundarijal, where he was in solitary confinement and didn't have access to newspapers, radio and meetings with relatives. BP also can't find the energy to do anything that taxes the mind too much.

14-12-77 [continued]

After breakfast I want to read + write, I haven't been able to do it—total disinclination for any serious mental work. I sit on the table all right + there is always a book open before me on the table or writing materials—pen + paper. That is all that happens by way of my literary work. I just sit quietly at the table waiting for some moments of inspiration. I become tired of sitting and waiting very soon. Then I start rearranging things in the trunk and boxes in the almirah, or the table + on the shelf. Then by 10AM, when the sun falls slantingly on the southern wall of my room from one of the eastern windows, I open the windows and I ask for the *chawki* to be brought into my campus on which I spread a bedsheet and try to bask in the sun. The presence of three sentries (there are two on the roof) looking down on me when I take the sun doesn't encourage me to stay out. I go back to the room and wait for the lunch. GM [Ganesh Man Singh] comes from his camp at about 10:30 + we take lunch. GM comes from his camp at about 10:30 + we take our lunch together. GM's lunch consists of rice, dal vegetables, + if there is meat, a portion of it. I take dal, vegetables, meat (optional). After lunch, which is over at about 11AM, GM goes back to his room + I go to my bed for some rest and sleep. I rest for an hour. Then I do sunbath, massaging my body with mustard oil all

the time. It takes about ½ hour. About that time I get *Rising Nepal* + *Gorkhapatra* + by 12:30 I finish reading them. Again, I attempt to read till 2PM, when GM comes to my room for an hour's joint reading of a voluminous book '*Mahakali dekhi Mechi samma*'. It is a worthless book giving a very superficial information about the kingdom, but since it helps me to pass, however boringly, 60 minutes of the day I listen to the reading of the book by GM. Exactly at 3PM GM puts the kettle of water to boil for tea. In the meantime we take some cheese + biscuits GM takes a glass of tea followed by a glass of milk with coffee. At about 4PM, he returns to his room and I start pottering about in the room to make it ready for the evening and the night, ie, I tidy the bed, pull down the mosquito net (there are still a few mosquitoes in the room, more than the protection, the net provides against them, it is a protection against the severe cold of the night). Close the curtains + draw the blinds and put on the room heater with a pan of water for the evaporation and humidity. Then I put on heavy clothes + go out for the evening constitutional, taking a brisk walk for ½ hour. I return to my room + begin to spend the evening waiting for the dinner to be served. This is the time I turn into various stations of radio for a good programme. I don't find them but the process occupies me for more than an hour. Sometimes I get

good music. GM comes into my room from the kitchen where he goes straight from his room to announce that dinner is about to be served. I go to the bathroom, wash my hands, peep into the kitchen + ask the boys is the dinner ready, and go to the table for the food. The dinner for me consists of some meat (optional) some dal, vegetables and some pop corn. GM takes dinner with a glass of milk with coffee. Then retires to his room after listening to broadcasts from BBC + All India. I try both books and radio to find out which of them would interest me. This keep me occupied for an hour. Sometimes I get good music, sometimes, not very frequently of course, a book excites interest. I finally go to bed at about 10PM, This has been a healthy change in my daily routine, otherwise I used to go to bed immediately after dinner. The day ends. I put off the heater, shut the radio, take off the heavy clothing and get into bed with the *Times of India* that has just arrived. But the moment my head hits the pillow, I become drowsy. I throw out the paper put on the night cap and put the table lamp out + go to sleep. Most of the time I get sleep promptly when I close my eyes. On some occasions I also seem to suffer, like others, from insomnia. When I feel that I wouldn't get sleep, I debate in my mind whether I should take valium or sedative—decide against it. How did I spend the day?

Songs for all seasons

The late Gopal Yonjan spent years researching and studying folk and traditional as well as classical Indian and Newari music. While remaining free from any rigid boundaries, his music captures a new Nepali *pan* that is apparent in *Ritu Ranga*. Yonjan's compositions reflect his deep and innate bond with his art.

This 44 minute-long CD begins with a flute piece before moving into three short pieces: 'Kathmandu', 'Selo' and 'Sagarmatha', followed by the six seasonal suite of 'Grishma', 'Barsha', 'Sharad', 'Sishir' and 'Basanta' and ends with 'Rhythms'. Yonjan composed *Ritu Ranga* in 1992 and the rest in 1983. 'Kathmandu' evokes the rhythms heard in the Newari bahals and toles in July and August as the locals make their way to Swayambhunath to pay homage to the Buddha during the Gunla festival.

'Selo' has the trademark Tamang Damphu beat interwoven with violin

Gopal Yonjan's compositions in *Ritu Ranga* are a major milestone

and flute—a hybrid "highland groove". 'Ritu Ranga', the six main compositions, borrow from the Nepal's cultural identity that is strongly interwoven with seasonal cycles. 'Sharad', for example, reflects the sound and verve of Indra Jatra while 'Barsha' captures the exuberance of the rains with the Santoor, Sitar and bells. The

concluding piece, 'Rhythms' is like the united heartbeat of Nepal. It is a percussion medley that incorporates everything from the Dholak of the tarai to the Damphu of the hill people. ●

Ritu Ranga is being launched on 3 March at the Garden of Six Seasons, Keshar Mahal.



BIGBEN



Cowmandos!



Playing host to Euro 2004 has lots of benefits

Portugal's big chance

MARIO DE QUEIROZ in LISBON

As host to the European Cup 2004, Portugal could shed its image as a sort of appendage to Spain and consolidate a position as a tourist destination.

Portugal is hoping to reap the fruits of a \$745 million investment in building 10 new stadiums for the championship that runs 14 June–4 July. No country hosting this international football tournament has ever gone to such lengths.

The Euro Cup is expected to attract more than a half-million visitors, in addition to the 9.5 million tourists arriving here annually, 61 percent of whom are Spaniards, Torres said. From the perspective of the tourism industry, the sector of the Portuguese economy that generates most cash, the governmental contribution of \$132 million towards the construction of the 10 stadiums is a reasonable investment, especially considering the returns in years to come.

The debate about whether it was justified to build 10 stadiums has been left behind, and now the focus is on attracting tourists, improving security, building new hotels, reinforcing transportation, airports, highways, hospitals and public services—and drawing the advertising dollars of the big transnationals. President Jorge Sampaio described Euro Cup 2004 as “a collective challenge for the country,” and Prime Minister José Manuel Durao Barroso said it is “an unbeatable opportunity to consolidate our international image”. Both have been on the frontlines of the “battle to promote” Portugal around the world.

The tournament premieres with a match between Portugal and Greece in Oporto, Portugal's second city, set on the coast 320km north of Lisbon. They will play at Dragao stadium, which holds 52,000 spectators and cost \$124 million. Also in Oporto, the Boavista stadium was rebuilt at a cost of \$56 million and holds 30,000 people. The national teams from Denmark, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Latvia, Spain and Sweden will be playing in the Oporto stadiums.

In the southern region of Algarbe, Spain will take on Russia in a stadium that holds 30,000 belonging to the cities of Luolé and Faro. The \$147 million Estadio da Luz, of the Benfica club in Lisbon, is considered one of

the 20 best in the world. It has a capacity for 65,000 spectators and will host the initial matches between Croatia, England, France, Portugal and Russia, as well as the final between the two teams that eliminate the other 14.

In Guimaraes, a city in the extreme north, where Don Afonso Henriques founded Portugal in the 13th century, a \$106 million stadium was built, bearing his name, and with the capacity for 30,000 people. The stadium belongs to the Vitoria football club and gained tragic notoriety on 25 January when young Hungarian player, Miklos Feher, forward for the Benfica club, died there of a heart attack. A 100km away, in Braga, the nation's “Catholic capital” according to tradition, a \$103 million stadium was built that has a capacity for 30,000.

The national teams of Bulgaria, Denmark, Netherlands, Italy and Latvia will be playing in the Guimaraes and Braga stadiums. Heading 120km south, one runs into Coimbra and its \$45 million stadium, which is to host matches played by France, England and Switzerland. The Aveiro and Leiria stadiums, located 150km north of the capital, were designed by the controversial architect Tomás Taveira. The total cost of the two stadiums was \$114 million. They will host matches between Croatia, France, England and Switzerland. ● (IPS)

UEFA - Euro Cup 2004 (<http://www.euro2004.com/competitions/euro/index.html>)

Golf cooperation council

The first-ever fund for developing golf in Nepal has been set up. Fore!



Tsenthok Dorjee, Station Manager of Druk Air, receiving the Running Trophy from Himalaya SJB Rana of Himalayan Bank last week.

A golf course is built, golfers come and play and those who realise the benefits and can afford to learn and take up the sport, do so. Once things are running smoothly, some begin to wonder how the sport can grow and spread to those that find it difficult to even find out if they would be interested.

You have to give something to get a return. Be it education, self-improvement courses, setting up and stocking a business or industry, giving your

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



time to a cause and, yes, even abandoning your principles as a bureaucrat or politician—some investment or sacrifice has to be made.

It often takes a person who has both foresight and passion to see a vision through to implementation. Many months ago, when the Himalayan Bank Limited (HBL) was planning on ways of promoting itself, the idea of a golf tournament was considered.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors, Himalaya SJB Rana, felt that simply a tournament for promotion without some further benefit to society would not be in line with HBL's commitment to being a socially-responsible and leading corporate body. The board of HBL heartily concurred.

When the Himalayan Bank Open Golf Championship concluded last Saturday, Chairman Rana announced that all entry fees collected from the tournament would go towards a Golf Development Fund.

In these cynical times, it would be easy to take a negative stance about this decision. One could say: “There are so many worthy causes to support, so why golf?” The case rests on blending good business

promotion with the development of a very popular and lucrative sport that opens up new horizons for making both a career and a mark in the world.

The benefits can be tremendous—learning to be a teaching professional, playing professional or even just being able to play the sport well opens up many avenues of income and contacts in the business world. It often signifies a degree of sophistication and belonging to a fraternity.

The thoughtful use of this new fund will be a major step towards the development of the sport amongst those who would normally not be able to afford access to equipment and training. With HBL's track record of professionalism and dedication, I foresee exciting developments of the sport ahead.

At the award ceremony last week, Rana said: “The general idea is to develop golf by providing opportunities to youngsters to start the game. We have started it and we want the

golfing community to give momentum to achieve significant progress.”

Highlights of the HBL Open Golf Championship was a win by Tsenthok Dorjee, Station Manager of Druk Air, in his first appearance in a tournament. He started playing golf only after his posting in Kathmandu last year.

In this space in an earlier column I had mentioned how difficult and rare it was to get a “hole in one”. This golfer's dream came true for Binod Shrestha who was given a special prize for his incredible shot on probably the most difficult Par 3 hole in South Asia.

HBL has shown that business promotions with contributions towards new opportunities can be successfully implemented, while Tsenthok proved that one can learn and be able to win a big tournament in less than a year's time. ●

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



"Lata ke desh me gamthe bander" (In a land of locks, a man with a goose is a hero.)



To see all the Adventures of Bering - Visit him in Nepal go to www.bering.com.np - Bering is now open - premises in Kathmandu, Bering

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Reflection and Reality** Paintings by Erina Tamrakar till 7 March at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Dolpo Lives** Paintings by Tenzin Norbu 6-20 March at Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat 10AM - 4PM

EVENTS

- ❖ **Nepal Ride** Daman, Sauraha and Pokhara with Himalayan Enfielders and VW rally from 4-6 March. 4440462
- ❖ **Aarohan Theatre Group** presents Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls House* at Sama nata ghar, Gurukul, Old Baneshwar. Weekends till 14 March. Tickets: Rs 25 (for students), Rs 50 and Rs 100. 4466956
- ❖ **Introduction to Foot Reflexology** 6-7:30 PM, 1 March. Above the Everest Bookstore at Babar Mahal Revisited. 4425931
- ❖ **Dhokaima Saturday Haat** from 10AM-1PM at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. Organic vegetables, ceramics and more. 5522113



MUSIC

- ❖ **Lifted Higher** DJs St Yves, Baba and Crystal Zero from 7:30 PM onwards on 28 February, Via Via café, Thamel
- ❖ **The Trio Givone** Gypsy Jazz band from France, every night from 7PM onwards at the Piano Lounge & Bar, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

FOOD

- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** BBQ lunch with live music at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, every Saturday and Sunday. Rs 650 per person. 4273999
- ❖ **Café U** in Sanepa, Patan, opposite British School is now serving dinner every Friday and Saturday night. 5523263
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for speciality coffees. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755

GETAWAYS

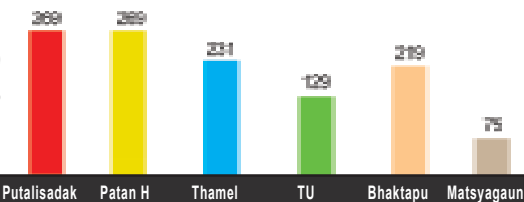
- ❖ **Escape to Godavari** on a special halfboard package for Nepalis and expatriates at the Godavari Village Resort, Taukhel. 5560675
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** Award winning Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500 TMPL Reservations or reservations@tigermountain.com
- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage** Dadagaon luxury package of gourmet meals, board and transport. Highland Travel & Tours. 4253352, 4253053
- ❖ **Golf in the Valley's** last pristine forest. Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa 4451212
- ❖ **Weekend Special** for Rs 3,000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



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

In spite of the bandas on Tuesday, 17 February and the public holidays on 18-19 February, average pollution levels last week in Kathmandu were still higher than the previous week. On the banda day, the PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) concentration in Putali Sadak went down by 30 percent, but it jumped back to 'normal' pre-banda levels on the following days. The banda did not have a major impact on the air quality in outlying areas such as Kirtipur, Bhaktapur and Matsyagaun which is another proof that PM10 is linked mostly to vehicular emissions. Lord Shiva may be partly blamed for the high level of PM10 last week as many Kathmanduites lit bonfires to celebrate Shivaratri.



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-26-02-2004 05:00 GMT



by MAUSAM BEED

The latest satellite images show clouds scurrying over Nepal from the west. A westerly jet propelling them all the way from the Mediterranean Sea has enough moisture to bring light rains to western and central Nepal early next week. The haze is growing thicker as the sand and dust from the plains is blow into our hills. Temperatures will climb steadily and this trend remains intact till a brisk southwesterly wind will makes a clean sweep of the skies. Other freaky features of this week's weather was Dipayal hitting 30 degrees Celsius and 6mm of rain in Taplejung.

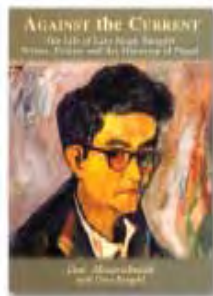
KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 23-06	Sat 22-07	Sun 23-06	Mon 24-05	Tue 25-05
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BOOKWORM

Against the Current Don Messerschmidt with Dina Bangdel
Orchid Press, 2004
Rs 850

This is a biography of Nepali writer, painter and art historian Lain Singh Bangdel, the "Renaissance man" of Nepal, chronicling his journey through the world of art to eventual national and international fame. Accompanied by photographs and color plates of his paintings, Messerschmidt's account of this unique figure in Nepali history is a must-read.



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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Strike while the iron is hot

Every four years, in his infinite wisdom, God gives humankind a bonus day. This Leap Year it falls on Sunday, 29 February—a reward from the Almighty for living our daily lives fulfilling Lord Bishnu’s wishes, and an extra 24-hour period in which we can do good deeds like eradicate polio and punish the corrupt.

And what a windfall it has been for our subterranean comrades who smartly seized the opportunity to incorporate the extra day in their marathon five-day banda and bring the country to another grinding halt. Using the Gregarious Calendar to convert a four-day strike into a five-day strike without actually adding a day is a stroke of genius.

Physicists and social scientists are fascinated by how Nepal has defied Newton’s Law by proving that a body in a state of rest can actually be brought to a state of even greater rest by the application of an external force. From the scientific point of view, it is a discovery of the same magnitude as being able to attain a temperature even colder than absolute zero.

Most Nepalis now realise that things can’t go on like this any longer: we can’t wait another four years for another Leap Day. We must be more creative, even more resourceful and inspired in inventing new ways of doing nothing. As usual, His Majesty’s Government lacks the political will to do nothing. It must standardise and streamline the application procedure for declaring general strikes and hartals so that they don’t fall on weekends and national holidays, so that the banda calls by various factions don’t clash and to coordinate the timetable for strikes by bringing out a shutdown calendar for 2061.

The government must immediately set up a Department of Bandobast under the Ministry of Home and Hearth so people can stay home and relax. If the government doesn’t fulfil these demands with immediate effect, we will declare a general strike as soon as the current general strike is over, that is if someone else hasn’t already declared a general strike on those days, in which case we will strike at the next opportunistic moment.



There are many ways we, as citizens, can exercise our rights in a democracy as we have seen in recent weeks:

- Lightning Strike: Work stoppage without warning, doesn’t strike the same place twice
- Lucky Strike: A strike which achieves its result as a result of a fluke and not because of the force of its logic
- General Strike: Work-to-rule by top army brass
- Three Strikes: Means you’re out
- Transport Entrepreneurs Strike: Nepali entrepreneurship at its shiny best under which passengers are required to ride on the roof and not sit in reclining seats in air conditioned comfort, because that would be against the national interest, and we need to protect domestic industry, don’t we?
- Gas Station Strike: If the government doesn’t let us rob people in broad daylight hours and expose them to carcinogens, we will close down our pumps indefinitely
- Pre-emptive Strike: Announcing your banda before someone else announces his banda, also known as ‘The Early Worm Ends Up in the Bird’s Gizzard’
- Ramp Bus Strike: Airlines care so much about passenger safety they are willing to lose Rs 3 million a day to keep forcing domesticated passengers to ride ramp buses built in the early Malla period out of discarded tin cans
- Hunger Strike: This is what most Nepalis have been doing for the past few decades
- Pen-down Strike: This column will be terminated with immediate effect in defiance of the Essential Services Act unless the government ensures the uninterrupted supply of taxfree hats at a subsidised rate, and bans the imports of cheap Indian hats

