



Poll pull

Suddenly, there is a lot of talk of elections. The government, under pressure from donors about the parliamentary crisis, is nervous about the donor group meeting in April. Suddenly, party factions are rushing to reunite. Kamal Thapa, who got the all-important Home Ministry portfolio last week, even specified dates. He told the BBC Nepali Service on Wednesday: "We are aiming at October-December so that we can get the security situation under control." That may be wishful thinking, given the escalation in Maoist violence and disruptions. There is speculation that King Gyanendra may announce polls at his Pokhara rally on 28 March. The parties say polls are a "ploy". On Thursday, the five-party alliance held a mock joint session of parliament (right) in which speakers delivered anti-monarchy tirades.

**Nepali Times**  
nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 127

**Q. How do you gauge the prospect of the Nepali Congress reuniting?**

Likely 45.12%

Not Likely 46.55%

Don't know 7.23%

Total votes:746

Weekly Internet Poll # 128. To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

**Q. Does a banda help or harm the organiser?**

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FRONT BENCHERS: Seated on front row of a simulated parliament (l-r), Bharat Mohan Adhikari, Sushil Koirala, Sahana Pradhan, Hridayesh Tripathi, Amik Sherchan, Narayan Man Bijukchhe, Madhab Nepal, Girija Koirala.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

# Nepal's tarnished image

## It is almost too late to salvage the national reputation

ANALYSIS by  
**KANAK MANI DIXIT**

The country's international reputation will face a high-profile challenge this month when the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva debates human rights abuses in Nepal for the first time.

European members of the commission, worried about the army's impunity in the counterinsurgency war, aim to put the Nepali government on the dock. The Swiss have prepared two draft resolutions: a harsh one blaming the government, and a consensual one in case the government makes moves to address the issue by then.

Foreign Minister Bhekh Bahadur Thapa is travelling to

Geneva on Wednesday on a damage control mission. As a worldly-wise diplomat, Thapa knows by now how far Nepal's image has plummeted in the past two years of conflict and half-hearted democracy. Nepal's parliamentary crisis and the inability or unwillingness of the Royal Nepali Army to conduct a clean war will soon get a lot of international attention.

Watchdog groups say that it was the Maoists who unleashed war against an elected government nine years ago, and don't doubt that they have practiced widespread abuse. But, they argue, the state has a bigger responsibility to protect citizens, including in times of war. The worry is that the RNA is putting the core humanitarian principles of the Geneva Conventions on hold in the hope that things will go back to

'normal' once rebels are defeated.

It has now gone beyond how all this will affect our tourism industry. Nepal's reputation is already sullied as the country joins the list of other human rights hotspots. *The Guardian* last month listed "some of the most dangerous and repressive regimes of the world": Colombia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Indonesia, the Philippines, Israel and Nepal.

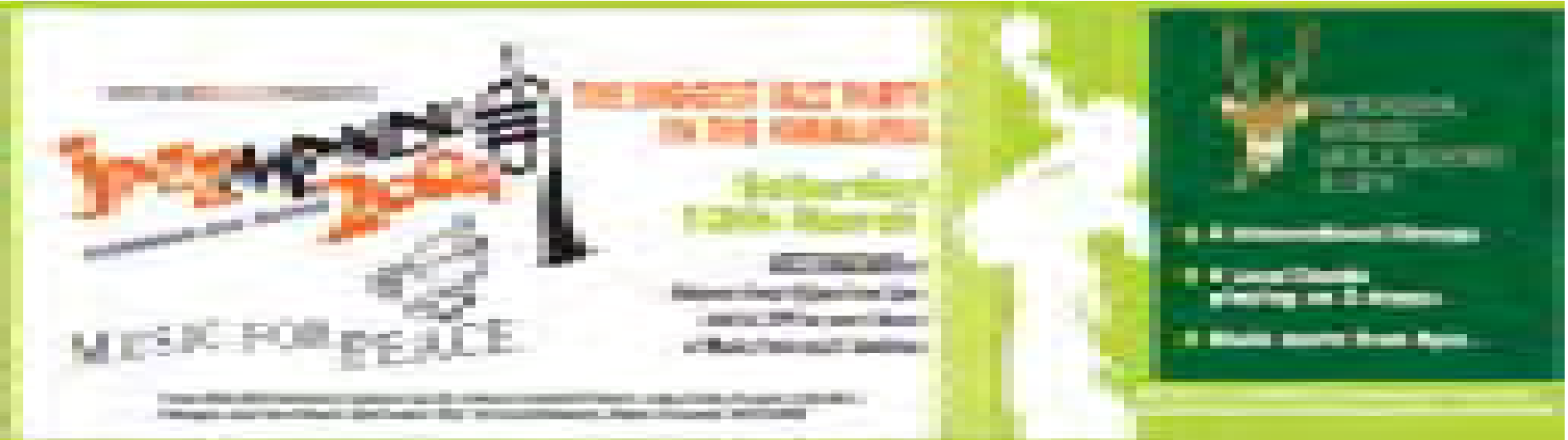
"The government must have got the message, but I fear the officials and the generals still don't realise the extent of international indignation that is building up," said one senior donor agency official on a recent fact-finding visit to Kathmandu.

Alarm bells are ringing loudly: Amnesty International issued notices on illegal detentions and dis-

appearances, and United Nations Special Rapporteurs on arbitrary detention, torture, and on extra judicial, summary and arbitrary executions have intervened. Human Rights Watch, has begun to monitor Nepal. Mainstream watchdogs like the International Crisis Group are stepping up the pressure, and even the US State Department's human rights report this year points to abuse by the army.

The United Nations Human Rights Commissioner has asked for a full and independent enquiry into RNA excesses. Knowing where the buck stops in the kingdom, the International Commission of Jurists has written a letter to King Gyanendra, and now the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is similarly engaged.

**continued p8**







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# 10,000+

One little item of news two weeks ago escaped the notice of most people: the Home Ministry's announcement that the number of Nepalis killed in the past nine years of the 'People's War' had crossed the 10,000 mark. That this is now a five-digit conflict, in itself, shouldn't make it any more serious than it already is. But it is a milestone that underlines the point that this has always been a senseless and unwinnable conflict. Adding another zero to the total toll just drives the point home.

At the rate we are going, with 30 reported deaths a week on average, it won't be long before we hit 20,000. Then, 30,000. And then, what? Will the Maoists be any nearer to a republic? Will the Royal Nepali Army be any nearer to wiping out the Maoists? All we will achieve is more Nepali deaths, thousands upon thousands will be orphaned and widowed, millions will be forced to leave their homes. What kind of Maoist utopia commands that sort of a price in blood and misery? The comrades have to ask themselves this question and find an honest answer.

The Maoists gave their revolution an ethnic edge with the declaration of seven autonomous zones in January. It is now in danger of going the way everyone feared: turning a class war into a caste war. The Maoists have enlisted the support of their wavering allies in the east by announcing the Kirant Autonomous Region, and crowned it with a major attack on Bhojpur. The Tamuwana and Tamasaling are blockading highways to strangle the towns.

It is now getting more and more difficult to believe that this revolution is moving along a pre-determined game plan. It looks seriously out of control. Giving the struggle an ethnic tint smacks of desperation, pointing to fatigue at its political centre. In any civil war, hardline militant or ethno-separatist elements gains supremacy when the political part of the struggle erodes or gets sidelined.

Lately, we are seeing signs of a movement that needs to invent new ways to stoke social anger for support. A political call for revolutionary transformation doesn't seem to be enough to carry the momentum forward. That may be why the Maoists don't seem to see a need anymore to consider public opinion. It doesn't seem to matter what the people think, in fact the strategy now seems to be to punish the people by assassinating anyone still left in the villages, declaring multiple bandas and blockading urban areas to inflict pain and panic on the public. Cold-blooded murders of innocents, ambushing dairy tankers, torching buses, lynching six people in Saptari and leaving their bodies to rot by a school all indicate that violence has now become an end in itself.

It is the responsibility of our current rulers, the underground comrades, the political parties who represent the Nepali people to take immediate steps to stop this slaughter before many more thousands die. Why should the people be made to suffer any more for their endless power struggle? Announce elections, agree on a ceasefire, and let the people decide who they want to be ruled by.



## STATE OF THE STATE

It is not possible to understand Jawahar Lal Nehru University (JNU) without having been either a student or a teacher here. It is a complex all-India institution where all kinds of people gather. It is true that Marxists are a majority at JNU, but there is no dearth of conservatives and neo-cons on campus. CK Lal has been needlessly disparaging about this illustrious university in ('Nepal from JNU', #185).

He has also made some factual mistakes: Parmananda is not a professor of Delhi University, he teaches at one of its lesser known correspondent colleges. Dharmadasani is an associate professor, but he does not claim to be a Nepal expert anymore. Similarly, I do not know how CK Lal got the impression that ordinary Indians support democracy in Nepal. It is quite the contrary, in fact. Indians revere the monarch of Nepal as the only Hindu king in the world. Superficial observations gathered during a two day trip may not be enough to come to such sweeping conclusions as Lal has.

**Shiva Raj Sharma,  
Pokhara**

● I was surprised to read in CK Lal's 'Which way now?' (#186) that "the government has admitted that there are about 50 US defence personnel in Nepal. Other sources claim it may be as high as 500 at any given time". I am afraid Mr Lal has been the victim of a misunderstanding. The total permanent US military personnel in Nepal numbers three in the Defense Attache and Defense Liaison offices at the US Embassy. In addition, there is a small Embassy Marine Guard detachment which is solely

## LETTERS

responsible for security within the Embassy and has no military liaison function whatsoever. Both are normal components of any US Embassy in the world. However, Mr Lal may have mixed up recent press reports (confirmed by the US Embassy as well as by the Royal Nepali Army) about the regular Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) that is held two to three times a year.

These events have been conducted with the Royal Nepali Army since the mid 1990s and are routine, recurrent training events held also with approximately 25 other countries in the Pacific region. Examples of recent JCET events include training for medical trauma, legal matters, human rights, community health and other civil affairs skills. Nepal's altitude allows a much appreciated opportunity for the participating US military personnel to train in higher altitudes than available elsewhere. The number of US military personnel participating in these events ranges anywhere from two to 40. The US Pacific Command's budget—apart from the personnel needs in our current military engagements in Iraq, Afghanistan, do not allow for a higher contingent of military personnel to be engaged in this training. Any claims of 'hundreds' or even 500 US military personnel being present in Nepal are therefore the product of someone's overly fertile imagination.

I would also like to add that the overall US security and military assistance to Nepal totalling \$17 million over the past two years, is significantly less than that provided by other countries.

**Constance Colding Jones,  
Public Affairs Officer  
US Embassy Kathmandu**

● Kudos to CK Lal for his excellent portrait of Nepalis at JNU in which the sharp-witted columnist paints the grandiose schemes of Indian academics who have just woken up from Rip-van-Winkle slumbers in their lofty ivory towers. A subtext of Lal's write-up is the age-old peril faced by similar nation states located in the shadows of emerging powers. To paraphrase an observation made in the context of another struggling nation: 'Nepal is so far away from god and so near to India.'

**Ram Limbu and  
Murasaki Shikibu CQU, Sydney**

## FR WATRIN

Thank you for your very moving editorial and tribute to Fr Eugene Watrin ('A guru of love'). Although I was never his student, at his funeral I realised just how many Nepali lives this remarkable priest had touched during his five decades of selfless work here.

**Jill Masters, Kathmandu**

● Only superlatives can describe Fr Watrin. He was a perfectionist in everything. One of the best basketball and hockey players, and swimming in the icy cold waters in Godavari was routine for him. Teacher wise, he was one of the best, if not the best. He inspired all Xavierians to be all-rounders like he himself was. We will all miss him.

**Amrit KC, Bishalnagar**



## CYBER-BANKING

Khadga Singh's 'Can we bank on the internet?' (#185) leaves out the work of Laxmi Bank Ltd, which installed the world class banking software, Flexcube, to ensure delivery of reliable and quality service to our clients. Flexcube is among the best banking systems in the world, with over 100 financial institutions worldwide having embraced it and enables safe, seamless and reliable service to our clients through a complete range of delivery channels including mobile and Internet devices. Laxmi Bank is the only bank to use Flexcube in the kingdom with complete internet banking. Laxmi Online has been offering this service since its inception to its customers. Along with the group account transfer offered by a bank in the article, Laxmi Online has the capability of third party transfer on real time. We provide direct payment to service providers/vendors besides third party payment routing system. Laxmi Bank is also the only bank where a website visitor can apply for account opening online.

**Bharti Pande, Laxmi Bank**

## LAK

When Daniel Lak said he was leaving Kathmandu for Miami, I opened a bottle of Kingfisher at this fortuitous turn of events. Finally, I could see an end to endless negativism and fashionable America-bashing or some diatribe on globalisation. I hoped he would quietly fade away to oblivion in Miami. Instead, I awoke in horror to yet another one of Lak's incoherent columns about the oppressed even as he kicks back in the Miami sun. The story is the same: America bad, everyone else good (particularly the "oppressed others"); donors bad, beer good (I can't disagree here); security forces bad, Maoists semi-bad. And, oh, here is Lak in Churchillian form: "The solution to democracy is more democracy." Must I drive down to Miami and have a beer with this man to straighten him out?

**P Rana, email**

## MANJUSHREE

Re: "Educating foreigners" (#186). Manjushree Thapa should not expect a foreigner to be familiar with the history of Nepal because we really don't have one—at least not one that has been properly recorded. Nepal is one of the least educated (not to mention one of the poorest) countries in the world today. Imagine what it must have been like in the past with hardly anyone being able to write down what was happening and everything being passed on by word of mouth. Before we even begin to think of 'educating foreigners' about our history, we should first educate ourselves and replace fiction with facts.

**SS Pal, email**

## CORRECTION

Buddhi Gandharba is the leader of Samundra Band, and not as reported in 'What they can do in Jazzmandu' (#186).



# Showing we have guts

**B**ravery is a basic instinct. Whenever there is a confrontation, an animal quickly weighs its options before choosing a course of action. Courage, however, has a moral dimension. Values, and not chances of success, prompt a person into taking a courageous stand.

STATE OF THE STATE  
CK Lal



Soldiers have to be brave, but their commanders need to be courageous. Political leadership requires moral courage, they can't make unpopular but necessary decisions if they just follow their followers.

Nepalis are renowned for our bravery. But are we courageous? It is a disturbing question, but facing it is the only way of growing into a confident nation-state. Our values do not seem to have evolved despite nearly a decade of democratic practice. Like most primitive societies, traditions in Nepal are stronger than religion and customs. Secular norms and values necessary to support democratic culture are still too fragile to make us take a courageous stand.

No wonder then, yet another crippling banda passed off without a whimper of protest. Privately, all of us cursed Maobadis for closing the

## We curse bandas, but meekly obey the diktat of its organisers

country down without rhyme or reason, but publicly we meekly obeyed the diktat of the outlaws. As a Nepali poet wrote: "This is how a country pretends to survive."

Nepal must be the only nation in the world where a mere rumour can cause a riot or shut down sections of the country. Traditionalists who are busy felicitating an activist monarch, don't dare question the Maobadis for making Nepal one of those countries primitive enough to be still using child soldiers. The Nepali intelligentsia has no faith in its own moral force, hence the excesses of the insurgents and the military alike go unchallenged.

An active monarchy has suddenly become a convenient refuge for those who made hay in the Panchayat sunshine, but were sidelined after 1990. They are the ones lambasting mainstream political parties at Raj Parishad meetings. Authoritarian systems are uniquely suited for ambitious political careerists who want to get ahead in life at any cost.

After October Fourth, there is a huge line of people waiting in the wings to see the king's hand-picked ministers stumble. Recent rumblings in the Surya Bahadur Thapa cabinet after the induction of Bhekh Bahadur

Thapa and the elevation of Kamal Thapa are endemic to a system where loyalty is the sole criterion overriding other value-loaded considerations like political representation, transparency of performance or public accountability.

In progressive societies, there is always a group of people who cite the past, analyse the present and predict the future, presenting a course of action. They are the ones who shape our values and help us protect them during turbulent times. Such individuals—for that's what they often are, fiercely independent individuals unencumbered by stifling organisations of any kind—are called public intellectuals. Alas, when Nepal needs them most, there aren't any in our horizon.

Most learned Nepalis with intellectual pretensions have begun to endorse the ambitions of an active monarchy, either explicitly with their words and deeds, or implicitly with their silence and inactivity. More than anything else, it's the absence of more important players from the field that has magnified the role of the press in promoting democracy in the country. But carrying the values of a society is too heavy a load for



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Nepal's still evolving media.

Thinkers have to emerge and imagine a more inclusive Nepali society. We need intellectuals to weigh the options and recommend courses of action. Politicians have to help organise people along competitive political ideologies. These are people who have the power to transform a people into a society and then build a confident nation.

Armed forces can enforce peace. Bureaucracy can implement programs. The business class can create wealth. But they do not a nation make.

Frequent bandas and a penchant for public felicitations are symptoms of a sick society. Reinventing collective values is the only way of preserving Nepali identity and building a more confident and inclusive collective. ●





# A medical menace in

## Kathmandu's hospital waste is a health hazard



ALL PICS: PRAGYA SHRESTHA

PRAGYA SHRESTHA

**A**t 7:30 in the morning the garbage truck arrives in the driveway of a hospital in Kathmandu. Waste tied up in plastic bags is taken away.

The truck winds its way along the Ring Road until it reaches the banks of the Bagmati at Balkhu. In the unbearable stench of the rotting garbage, amidst flocks of crows and kites, a large crowd from the nearby slum is waiting. The tiptruck empties its rubbish and men, women and children scramble over the fresh garbage with their metal tongs, rummaging for pieces of plastic, glass and other valuables that can be sold for recycling.

The garbage from the hospital contains a plastic bag with discarded placenta and other human organs, there are used syringes and plastic bottles. "Sometimes the drug addicts come around to see if they can find needles," says one young garbage forager as he walks off with a sackful of plastic water bottles.

As Kathmandu Valley's population grows, so do the numbers of hospitals and clinics. This has led to a rise in the volume of hospital waste, and there is mounting evidence that not all hospitals are disposing of hospital waste in a safe and proper manner.

In the course of investigating this article, the worst waste mismanagement was found at the infectious diseases hospital in Teku. We found open waste buckets with used syringes in paper boxes. The danger of Hepatitis B and HIV infection to hospital staff, waste handlers and scavengers at the landfill sites from such careless disposal is high.

Two years ago, the municipality installed an incinerator in Teku for burning hospital and other waste, but it never went into operation because of public opposition. Now, Kathmandu mayor Keshav Sthapit is fed up, and says he is going to get the incinerator started no matter what. "I don't care who opposes it, the hospital waste problem is getting serious," he told us.

Public interest litigation group Pro-Public says an incinerator for hospital waste in the city's centre will in fact be more of a risk to the public due to dioxins and toxic ash from the emissions. "We are not for or against anybody, we just want to flag this danger and urge the authorities to look at alternatives," says Ashoke Dev Pande of Pro-Public.

A lot of the problems could be solved if hospitals did their own sorting and disposal. The Maternity Hospital in Thapathali has its own incinerator, but it was moved to Banepa five years



ago because the UN Park was being set up nearby along the Bagmati River. "We never got any help from the government, and now there is no more space left here for another incinerator," says Sharmila Ligan, matron of the hospital. As a result, much of the blood and human organs from the maternity and surgical wards are disposed along with other urban garbage.

Some of the newer private hospitals show more care: they segregate their waste in coloured buckets and even have needle destroyers and small incinerators to dispose of the more hazardous wastes. But Manohar Lal Shrestha, superintendent

# Loving to hate Haiti

## It's best to keep donors, neighbours and the big powers engaged

PORT AU PRINCE—So far from God. So close to the United States.

That phrase was coined more than a century ago to describe the plight of Latin America, more particularly Mexico, which had just lost a disastrous war to Washington.

Haiti today is in a similar situation. This is a country that is proud of its beginnings but embarrassed about its present,

HERE AND THERE  
Daniel Lak



frightened of a bleak future. France

was the colonial power here. Woe betide any of the lands that fell under the sway of Paris, but Haitians managed all on their own to see off their French overlords in 1804. Haiti became the world's first black republic.

From the beginning, Washington and Paris collaborated to make Haiti pay for its audacity. The US refused to recognise the newly independent state. Nor did France allow any maritime trade with its own West Indian colonies or mainland business hosues. Shamefully, both countries believed that Haiti's slaves—men and women that fought successfully for their freedom against overwhelming odds—were stray possessions of some white businessman somewhere, some slave trader. And as such, they were rogue assets. They hadn't bought their freedom, so they were stolen goods. Thus the depravity of slavery, which helped found and stabilize many modern western

economies, and has never been apologised or compensated for.

In Haiti, a mixed-race elite speaks disparaging of the "slave" mentality of the black majority. This is a mentality that the elite helped cultivate carefully over generations to maintain their economic and behind-the-scenes political power. This was done with the active cooperation of Washington, Paris and many other foreign capitals who wanted only stability in Haiti. They cared not a whit about social or economic justice.

In truth, this is a place that matters little to big foreign powers. America's main concern is that boatloads of Haitian refugees don't start washing up on the beach in

south Florida. That is why US Marines are patrolling the streets in Port au Prince and American diplomats are taking a lead role in trying to arrange a political solution to the current chaos.

It wasn't always so. American troops have invaded this island four times. They occupied Haiti from 1915 until the 1930s. Much of the current inequitable mess here can be traced back to policies forced on the Haitians in those days. Now a rabidly right wing Bush administration pursues an obsessive hatred of a left wing leader, Jean Bertrand Aristide, and even helps force him from office in what's little better than a coup.

France—a nation where pride and hubris often seem indistinguishable—still feels that

Haiti is part of La Patranomie, the worldwide band of French speaking countries that look to Paris for cultural guidance. It's not. But the French do love to play the colonial master, even today. So French troops are here as well, squinting at local women through clouds of cigarette smoke, and looking sharp in their newly pressed fatigues and flash sunglasses.

A few small regional players, Canada, Chile and others, are helping out too. They like to build their own self-image of helpful, caring, cuddly countries. But really, no one cares about Haiti. Everyone hopes it will disappear from the radar screen, sink beneath the waves of the Caribbean Sea, just go away. It's a sinkhole of despair with a unique culture that cares mostly about itself, thinks it is the centre of the universe.

Sound familiar? Nepal should keep an eye on attitudes in foreign capitals. Sometimes if they don't care about you, it's worse.

Local ambassadors with bees in their bonnet, and we've had a few in Kathmandu, get to make policies in a vacuum. National interests on either side are ignored. It's best to keep your donors, neighbours and the big powers engaged.

Perhaps we need to convince some Nepalis to take to the seas and head for south Florida. Or to try to get closer to some version of God. ●









# Protesting more creatively



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**There must be alternatives to tyre burnings, bandas, juluses, chakka jams, and other more life-threatening methods**

point does symbolic protest change into another mass action and who monitors this? Where are the rules? Do you match ruthlessness, idiocy and oversimplification, if those are the terms of the debate? What is the point of protest these days: to change things or to make one's voice heard? Is not being silenced a victory, and if so, how precisely are "we" of urban English-speaking bourgeois protest being muzzled? Does it even bear thinking what it means to commit the "indignity", as Foucault called it, of speaking *for* others?

Could it be that the really sticky question here is not about the varieties of protest, but about whether it is an appropriate response to the situations, facts and demands that make today? Maybe creative protest would be to be horribly passive. Maybe you'd just keep quiet and not confuse issues, ignoring their affiliations and peacetime politics, and leave the doctors and nurses, the lawyers, the reporters, the teachers, the social scientists, whoever, to do what they do. On the other hand, maybe not.

These are not nihilistic or even cynical questions, at least not now, and not from me, nor invitations to sophomoric theoretical debates. They are put humbly to people who understand these things. I am confused. Completely and horribly, and dwelling on it makes me a snappy, irritable person. I suspect a lot of people feel like this. Am I the only person making myself ridiculous by admitting? ●

**A**bout half-a-dozen times in the last month I've heard the phrase "creative protest". It's a term that's been around the block a few times, but when it comes up these days I find myself goggling with the incomprehension or

**NEITHER HERE  
NOR THERE**  
Anagha Neelakantan



repeating it in some mindless

data entry task.

I'm not sure where this is a reflection on the state of the state, or the state of uncertainty and ambiguity among a certain demographic about whether, if at all, they have any agency to change the course of events, they have the energy to think of ways of doing so or the semantic confusion and increasing wordlessness one sees in the face of a situation where there are relentless litanies of resentment and blame, guilt and

anger and surely, if we're honest, a sense of our own complicity in letting things come to this pass.

One of the reactions to this is wanting to "do something". Creative protest. What? Peace marches, graffiti, street theatre, public installations, petitions, being civil, working harder, what does it mean? Is it about subtlety, about being provocative, about feeling collective outrage? Do we want to protest creatively, not through tyre burnings, bandas, juluses, chakka jams and other more life-threatening methods?

What about the people and actions one is protesting against? Here things start to get more confusing, not in the murky manner of existential questions, but in ways that the more sensitive and intelligent might be able to unravel: which of the half-dozen candidates who all deserve our heartiest protests and all the curses in the motherland

do you pick? How do you creatively protest the spectrum of objectionable behaviour these people and their institutions and organisations represent, from gross negligence and irresponsibility, to murder.

Most of us know somewhere in our conscience that we too are complicit, in many bad things in many sad places, but what about people who seem to make it their specific business to be negligent, irresponsible and murderous? Does creative protest mean that you make clear the differing levels of guilt that coexist with occasional righteousness? Can an action or a set of words convey such nuances? Or is protest, like hero worship and most popular politics, about simplification, about catchphrases?

Is it protest that works, that changes things tangibly? Does this exist? At what

## Women in exile

How long can we survive this hemorrhage?

SURENDRA KAFLE in NEPALGANJ



**T**he number of Nepali women migrating to India for security and employment is growing with the intensity of the conflict in the mid-western hills.

Women, many carrying children, thronged the Nepal-India border at Rupediya. When interviewed, many say they were forced to leave their homes due to Maoist activities and search operations by the security forces.

Dhan Maya BK has come a long way from Badagaun village of Salyan district. Clutching her two-year old baby on her back, she is now on the way to Simla to join her husband where he has been working for the last two years.

"Unless peace returns to my home village, I will probably settle down there, that is if the Indians allow us to," Dhan Maya says. Her elderly parents-in-law are the only members of the family still left in Badagaun. Other villagers and relatives have all left.

"It's better to stay in India than to go through all the uncertainty and misery in my village," says 45-year-old Bhim Kumari Buda from Kalwang of Rolpa, who is crossing the border to join her husband and son in New Delhi.

Traditionally, men have migrated from Nepal's food-deficit

mid-hills to India for seasonal employment. Once the war started, the exodus of young men grew. Now older men and women are also leaving with children.

Many teenagers are fleeing, fearing Maoist conscription and harassment by the security forces. Radha Pariyar is 12 years old and says she fled Surkhet with her brothers because she was afraid the Maoists would take her. "At least in India I will be safe and can send money back to my parents," says Radha.

DSP Ram Bahadur Thapa, who mans the border post in Rupediya, confirms that the numbers of Nepali women crossing over has increased since the end of ceasefire last August. On an average, he says he counts at least 10 women every day traveling with children and all their belongings to India. Thapa's records show that in just two months, more than 600 women aged 10-60 years have left Nepal at Nepalganj.

Most women say they are leaving because they are harassed by both the Maoists and the army to reveal the whereabouts of their husbands and sons. They can't take it anymore, and neither, it seems, can the country survive this hemorrhage. ● (Mahila Bolchin)





SUBHAS RAI

# Democracy-II

## What should the new model look like?

Although things started going horribly wrong halfway through it, Democracy-I delivered many good things since 1990: A slew of domestic airlines made the passenger king instead of the RNAC's ticket tout. Quality schools sprang up to meet pent up demand. Medical emergencies no longer required a trip to Vellore, Bombay or Bangkok. Electric vehicles did make Kathmandu's air a bit cleaner, now we need to phase out brick kilns.

parliament nor destructive comrades are the answer, then how do we resume building prosperity with economic growth that we started in the early 1990s once sanity returns? Mass aspirations can be satisfied, not by a market that caters to elite luxury, but only by one that caters to mass needs. Mass markets function best with mass politics having built-in checks and balances. Ergo: a democracy with a critically engaged civil society, innovative

entrepreneurs free but bold enough to take risks and a government that is representative, receptive and responsive. We had them all, so why did it unravel? If Democracy-II is to succeed, what is the minimum reform it must undergo? Democracy is ultimately about equality, where a level playing field excludes none that subscribes to its rules. But what if elected representatives who are supposed to maintain the rules

capture the field for themselves? What should be done to make sure Democracy-II will not be another tragic rerun of hijacked Democracy-I? One of the prerequisites of a functioning democracy is the separation of state powers. This has been the fatal flaw in our constitution. On one extreme, the judiciary is theoretically so independent it has been accountable to none for the mismanagement therein, a situation that has been termed "judicial anarchy". At the other end, a venal parliament could disband local governments which—by lasting their two full terms—were the only functioning institution of Democracy-I. The most serious flaw, however, has been the fusing of the legislature

with the executive along the Westminster model (which, as Lord Meghnad Desai maintains, does not even work in an England that is integrating with the EU). MPs were no longer trying to become good law makers, but rent-seeking traders amassing public funds to get themselves re-elected to repeat the cycle. Even the MPs in opposition failed to raise their voices in protest simply because they eventually hoped to replace the executive to continue the very same business. If the Russian, Swiss or American models were followed that do not allow an MP to simultaneously hold an executive job, perhaps we will go a long way in making sure that politics becomes public service instead of a public disservice. ●

GUEST COLUMN  
Dipak Gyawali



Newspapers and FMs verge on robust anarchy as they compete to inform the Nepalis who have long stopped switching to foreign wavelengths. Apartment housing has sprung up with the promise of urban renewal. Even the Bagmati, at least at Pashupati, has become cleaner. But were these things the result of enlightened politics or simply pent up forces bursting forth in new found freedoms? The political changes in April 1990 were brought about less by the leadership of political parties than by a restive middle class catalysed by the civic protests of artists, poets, journalists and professionals. Good things started happening when entrepreneurs were pushed by the catalysing activism of civil society, and were no longer shackled by an omnipotent Panchayat bureaucracy. They happened despite 12 unstable governments in as many years, and would have continued if not stymied by two tragedies: The first and primary culprit was the descent into veniality of the elected who put themselves up for sale. This led to the next tragic chain that morphed into the Maoist violence. When the senate and the praetorian guards auction their services, it is not the law-abiding *malhujans* that avail of them but fixers and wheeler-dealers. National policies then become short-term profit skimming with no thought for those beyond the Kathmandu Valley rim. The excluded exploded in anger, and the Maoists who never received more than minority votes in any election were quite effective in exploiting this. Because they do not believe in suffering free dissent or entrepreneurship not sanctioned by its politburo, it is doubtful if the Maoists path of 'Destruction before Creation' can ever create enough wealth to satisfy everyone. If neither a rent-seeking





A 100,000 litre storage tank under the Kathmandu Valley Water Distribution Improvement Project in Min Bhawan nearing completion.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

## High and dry in Kathmandu

### Pondering lessons from water privatisation on World Water Week

Cochabamba, Buenos Aires and Manila resonate loudly in the ears of opponents of water privatisation.

Transnationals have retreated from these cities in the middle of their contracts, making them 'best practice' examples of how *not* to privatise public water companies in the South. In their heydays, the World Bank and a handful of transnationals were joint partners in liberalising the annual \$200 billion global water industry.

LONDON EYE  
Joti Giri



There is now a paradigm shift in the strategies of the water sector's key actors. The World Bank's privatisation jihadis and pro-poor crusaders, under

pressure from key stakeholders, have moved the goal post from their dogmatic mantra of privatisation to a non-ideological position.

A harsher economic climate and debt restructuring have also forced water companies to retrench from their globalising spree. Water companies are also starting to appreciate that many customers in the South view water as a common good and therefore generating revenue by providing services of this packaged commodity is not commercially viable.

Large contractual losses in the developing world have turned the utilities' future investment strategy towards less volatile markets in north America and eastern Europe. But there is a risk in this strategy as well. The market does not have inherent social responsibility and cannot be relied to improve or deliver water services to the world's poor. Clearly, a refocus is required.

There are 1.2 billion people without access to safe drinking water and double that without adequate sanitation. The UN's Millennium Development Goal target is to halve these by 2015. How do we bridge this water divide and funding gap?

The battle for Kathmandu's water supply can be won. Private involvement in the Valley's water sector is being primed to go live early next year with the appointment of a management contractor. This public-private partnership would be a perfect opportunity to showcase the capability of an organic Made in Nepal solution to a thirsty world.

Even if it is only a management contract, why would a private water operator want to risk its brand name in the unstable murky political waters of Kathmandu? Grandiose mission statements such as "water partner to the world" is no longer *de rigueur*. Is this part of a genuine corporate social responsibility strategy?

There are important lessons for Kathmandu from Puerto Rico to the west Manila Maynilad (which was initially hailed as a privatisation success). The winners practiced 'dive bidding', and promises of cheaper water and improved services for the poor were never delivered leading to the renegotiation of terms of conditions with the new regulators who did not have sufficient teeth for enforcement. Prices went up without services being improved.

When corruption is endemic, and no tradition of a regulatory system, the key challenge is the creation of a strong and independent regulator in Kathmandu. Another challenge is the bidding and contract process. The winning bid should not be decided only on lowest user tariff or best operating margins. Other intangibles should be considered.

Next week (14-22 March) is World Water Week. The same old leaders will be dusting off the same old script and parrot the same old rhetoric. But where is the political will? Kathmandu water privatisation must learn from history. Rulers must facilitate a successful project implementation. Otherwise history will judge them harshly, providing violence instead of water. ●

# Heartbreak hotels

Despite increased tourist arrivals, hotels say they still need help paying bank loans

KHADGA SINGH

The recent increase in tourist arrivals may have been good news for travel trade in general, but it raised hackles between hoteliers and their bankers.

The banks who loaned hotels money say the industry is not sick anymore and now have to start paying back. Hoteliers are playing down the tourism boom and argue that their earnings are still at an all-time low.

When the government declared hotels a 'sick industry' it allowed them to pay banks only 12.5 percent of loan interests and stretch repayment schedules. The banks now want the hotels to pay the full 25 percent of loan interests and say they will not agree to any rescheduling.

There was a 23 percent jump in tourist arrivals in 2003 compared to the previous year. The first two months of 2004 saw a whopping 40 percent growth compared to the same months last year. Hoteliers argue that a visitor head count doesn't mean anything since it doesn't translate into revenue. A majority of tourists are visiting Nepal under heavily rebated packages that leave no profit margin, they say.

"We are getting guests who are paying \$200 for seven nights and six days inclusive of full board, meals, sightseeing and even free transport to and from the airport," Hotel Association Nepal (HAN) president Narendra Bajaracharya told us. "How can people expect us to earn profit?" He said five star hotels were selling rooms for \$10 per night, which is why the rate of return even for crowded hotels is much below average.



Bankers say they understand that hotel earnings may not be as high as the pre-1999 period, but they are not convinced by the hoteliers' sob stories on earnings. "We know that they have slashed their rates and that they are not getting quality tourists," says Nepal Bankers' Association (NBA) President Narendra Bhattarai. "But the fact that occupancy has gone up must mean that the income has gone up too."

Around 16 percent of banks' overall loans are to the tourism industry and hoteliers have taken 80 percent of that amount. NBA would not reveal the actual loan figure, nor would hoteliers. There is no breakdown of which sector of the tourism industry earns what proportion. Asian Development Bank data shows that the country earned \$151 million through tourism last year, up from \$106 million in 2002.

What share of that pie went to the hotels may only be known when Nepal Rastra Bank brings out its annual revenue figure. But hotel operators claim that an increase in what they call non-revenue-generating tourists will only brand Nepal as a 'cheap' destination. Other tourism experts, however, believe

that the growth in arrivals, even though they may be discounted, will help Nepal maintain its tourist destination image and keep doors open for future growth.

Says Nepal Tourism Board CEO Tek Bahadur Dangi. "If they say that they have not been able to earn despite the increased arrivals, they must blame their own cheap prices."

Sightseeing tours, trekking and accommodation suffered a similar fate. Even when tourist arrivals had reached the peak (500,000) in 1999, hoteliers still complained that only between 35-40 percent of their beds were occupied.

Admits former HAN president Yogendra Shakya: "We must fix the price ourselves and stick to it to make our clients feel that they have had a fair deal." The government has withheld the idea of standardisation of services in the tourism industry considering the downturn of the travel trade in recent years. That slump is exactly what hoteliers point at when they ask their banks to agree to 12.5 percent of interest payment right now and for the rescheduling of the loan repayment. Some hotels have already begun to convince their bankers on their own, while others are waiting for their association to take up the cause. ●

## Inhuman reputation

from p1

If the government and military do not move quickly to assure the international community that they are serious about controlling abuse, Nepal may soon find foreign aid drying up and its role in UN peacekeeping jeopardised. The country is beginning to emit an odour as reports of torture, extra-judicial killings and secret and illegal detentions add up, and could end up being treated as a pariah state. As evidence of human rights abuse by the security forces piles up, and with only token punishment against those found guilty, the label *bepatta parieka* has now entered the Nepali lexicon, as *desaparecidos* did in Latin America.

There is consternation among some generals about being given the impossible task of subduing rebels in the most insurgent-friendly terrain in the world all by itself. Indeed, the soldiers are being asked to fight in a political vacuum, which has given the rebels strength far beyond their numbers. A force with feudalistic history has not been able to fight clean, nor manage its image. When challenged, the response of the most senior brass is: "There is a war on." Those who raise their voices within Nepal against impunity are denounced for

lowering the morale of the security forces.

As the Geneva hearings approach, the RNA appears to have got the message. Army spokesman, Col Deepak Gurung told the press Thursday that the major implicated in the Doramba massacre in August is in custody, and the army's investigations had shown that some of the Maoists were killed in the encounter while others died after being captured. He said the army has started court martial proceedings against those involved.

In response to demands that the army sign the NHRC's draft Human Rights Accord, the government has drawn up a unilateral code of conduct, called a 'commitment document'. But those privy to its content say it is a watered down version of the NHRC's draft, lacks provisions for investigating abuse by the security forces, and is selective in its reference to Nepal's international treaty commitments.

The head-in-sand attitude on impunity and abuse is tarnishing Nepal's reputation and will ultimately come back to haunt the country. All eyes are on King Gyanendra who, as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the RNA, has the power and responsibility to look out for the public good. ●



BIZ NEWS

Power guidelines

Following a meeting last week between an International Hydropower Association (IHA) team and Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, who is also the Water Resources Minister, the government has announced it will adopt the IHA guidelines for hydroelectricity development in the country.

IHA is a representative organisation of hydropower development, production and distribution agencies from across the globe and the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is a board member of the association. The IHA guidelines addressing social and environmental aspects during hydropower plant construction came after worldwide criticism of a World Commission on Dams report. NEA officials believe that adopting the IHA guidelines will help Nepal get financial assistance from multilateral agencies like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Nepal has feasible potential to generate up to 40,000MW of power, but the national grid so far has only tapped 600MW.

Private telecom

After years of pressure from the private sector to end the state monopoly on telecommunications, a policy allowing private players to run telecom services is to finally come into effect soon.

The documents were drafted a month ago, and lawyers are giving it a final touch. "We just need time to develop a legal framework and a process to open up the services to the private sector," says Mukunda Prasad Acharya, spokesperson for the Ministry of Information and Communication. Plans to privatise Nepal Telecommunication Centre (NTC) and open up the telecom sector to private companies started in 2000, and gathered momentum with public outrage over NTC's poor service.

While the decision opens up a new wave of opportunity for private companies, NTC will also be given a stake in the competitive market. "The government will no longer control NTC and limit its commercial growth," says Acharya. Plans to privatise NTC are underway, but the government may take it slowly since it doesn't want to antagonise its large staff. It may first be turned into a public limited company and float shares. "In the long run, this will be good for NTC, and Nepalis will have access to all kinds of telecom services," adds Acharya. To make the services easily available in the rural areas, the government has also decided to establish a Rural Telecommunications Fund. There are also provisions for a new cyber law.

NEW PRODUCTS

DIRECTOR'S SEAT: Shaw Wallace, Indian alcohol and beverage industry giant, is now in Nepal to launch Director's Special and Director's Special Black whiskies, with plans to release more brands in the future. 180ml of Director's Special is priced at Rs 95, with Rs 110 for the same of Director's Special Black.



The outsourcing locomotive  
Nepal should hitch its wagons too

Outsourcing is a major debate in United States as the country prepares for November's elections. If Kerry wins, it will have a lot to do with the economic issues of trade blocs and outsourcing. It is not only our Nepali business fraternity that loves protectionist economic policies. US businesses are crying foul on losses arising out of NAFTA and jobs moving out the country. Some states are even contemplating legislation to circumvent this trend.

With unemployment at an all time high, there is much resentment of



LOSING HER JOB: Indian IT workers like this one in Bangalore may lose her job if outsourcing is curbed.

amongst school graduates. The message is loud and clear: change the focus.

For Nepal, the trend of outsourcing should emerge as an opportunity in the future if we start planning now. Just as production jobs moved from Japan to South Korea to China due to cost increases created by the demand for higher wages to support better living, the same will happen with India. In India, outsourcing centres are already moving from the metropolitans to smaller cities, and Nepal will have comparative advantage in terms of wages, and our

growing numbers of English speaking youth will provide the pool of resources. However, Nepal will definitely need to look again at the labour and employment-related legislation to make this happen. This lesson has already been learnt from transcription centres that once ran well, then crumbled due to problems with legal provisions.

Outsourcing will dominate the way business is done in the coming years, with firms focusing on their core activities and outsourcing other work whenever possible. Nepal has to recognise this trend and join the bandwagon. Surely, this could be an interesting US-Nepal co-operation issue to tackle. ●

ECONOMIC SENSE  
Artha Beed



outsourcing. First call centres moved out, then data centres followed. A large pool of 'digital clerks' are available in south Asia as well as eastern Europe at a fraction of the US costs. The trend continues with more specialist back office jobs like accounting and software writing also moving out. India is building more facilities and global players are setting up shop there.

However, contrary to the common American belief, outsourcing works well for the US economy. It ensures that the cost of production and services are reduced. If outsourcing stopped, costs would

rise, thereby creating an inflationary trend in the economy that would depress business growth. One should also recall that there was a great deal of hue and cry when computer hardware businesses moved out of the US to southeast and east Asia in the early 90s. However, there were great benefits to the US economy as the firms then focused on the software and making strides in IT and communications. Similarly, the relocation of routine jobs ensures that the skilled manpower focuses on research and development instead, and also encourages people to move towards graduate degrees and higher education. In the US unemployment mix there is virtually no unemployment

“Money laundering is happening.”



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Ashoke SJB Rana is chief executive officer at the Himalayan Bank Limited. He talked to *Nepali Times* about the current banking situation in the country and the potential pitfalls of a new umbrella banking Act for financial institutions.

**Nepali Times:** How is the overall banking scenario?

**Ashoke Rana:** The banking scenario is very competitive. There have been a lot of changes right now due to the new umbrella Act and the provisional blacklisting six months ago. Capital has become a very important issue. Banks that don't have the required capital size are going to have a difficult time.

**So is the umbrella Act good or bad?**

It is needed, but there are some areas that we have expressed concerns about, mainly on the board directorships. They have fixed the number of board directors at seven, out of which one has to be nominated by a panel of Nepal Rastra Bank designated experts. As a non-voting member, I think it will create a lot of problems. It is disruptive when people have invested and cannot represent themselves in the board. The act also fixes qualifications for directors, two-thirds must be graduates in certain fields. Our question is why only commerce graduates or a chartered accountants? Why can't a mathematician be on the board? The draft act is not well-thought in these cases. They have given all the rights of the commercial banks to development banks, but not vice-versa. To be a CEO of a commercial bank, you have to have a post-graduate degree but to be CEO of a development bank you just have to be a university graduate.

**Has liquidity dropped because of loan schemes?**

A lot of banks have launched retail loan schemes like home loans, car loans. There has been a surge in economic activities and the consumer side is booming even though industries are suffering in the current security situation. But banks still have liquidity. Deposits have lately gone up by 13 percent.

**Is the entry of foreign banks a threat?**

They are welcome. I think there will be healthy competition because they will be well-regulated. They will have strict credit norms and it will also bring expertise into the market. May be we will also have new areas of banking.

**You bid for administering the World Bank's Power Development Fund. How was that handled?**

We had put together a very sound technical bid, but we later found that the bidding was focused on financial matters. If we knew that was happening, we would have bid slightly differently. Maybe we would not have taken high-cost partners from the US, Germany and New Zealand. We found out through the papers that a certain bank had become the PDF administrator and we were not informed.

**In case of a re-bidding, would you take part?**  
Yes, I think we would.

**Most new banks are based in Kathmandu Valley? How come?**

That is something you will have to ask Nepal Rastra Bank. Why were so many licenses issued? During the 12 years of the multiparty system, politicians could not help being influenced while issuing licenses. The central bank has made stricter requirements of between Rs 500 million to Rs 1 billion of paid up capital for new banks, still people are trying to come in. Some are trying to be regional banks to get in.

**Criminal transactions in the banking sector are said to be on rise.**

Apart from a few cases of forged signatures in cheques, we are now looking at money laundering. Banks now have to follow the 'KYC' (Know Your Customer) policy. If we want to deal with foreign banks abroad, we will have to furnish our KYC policy and different anti-money laundering policies. Because of the Nepal Rastra Bank's strict foreign currency guidelines we have been following, we are not a target of foreign money laundering, but we can be susceptible to money laundering inside the country.

**Is it happening?**

I think it is. We have noticed some accounts having large movements of cash to different parts of the country. In such cases, we ask them to close the accounts.

**What kind of money laundering is this?**

Any amount of money acquired through illegal means and on which taxes have not been paid.



New on the line: a Japanese cloned orchid



# Orchid fever

Natural beauty isn't the only thing Nepal's orchids have to offer

ALL PICS: SRADDHA BASNYAT

SRADDHA BASNYAT

**T**here is something about orchids that makes crazed enthusiasts travel thousands of miles for a single picture. No other flower evokes such passion.

Some orchids are so coveted that collectors have carried out spectacular heists of rare specimens.

Nepal is a paradise for orchids, the moist climate and the cloud forest environment is ideal for them. That also makes Nepal a paradise for orchid smugglers. In the 1980s, according to one estimate, up to 100 lorries of dried Nepali orchids plundered from our forests were

lined up ready to head south.

Now, Nepal's orchid experts and enthusiasts are working to save this national treasure. And their fascination with the fancy flower also has financial benefits.

Bharat Rai and his partner Kabiraj Rai started up an orchid farm

in Godavari as a way to keep busy after retirement. Their farm, Rai's Orchid, has been producing potted hybrid orchids and cut flowers commercially since 2002. Bharat Rai handles the management and logistics, but orchids are actually Kabiraj Rai's passion turned commercial venture. And he loves telling us how it's done.

"Orchids are propagated in three ways: from pseudobulbs, through plant division and tissue cultures," he explains. In pseudobulb propagation, orchid bulbs give off one, sometimes even two, shoots. Once the shoots are a year old, the back bulbs can be removed to begin another plant. The little plant is still another two to three years from flowering. But if one pot contains several bulbs along with their shoots, an alternative is plant division. After the orchid blooms, back bulbs, each along with one shoot, can be separated and replanted. However, Rai prefers to work with tissue cultures.

In nature, orchid seedpods burst open, releasing hundreds of thousands of seeds in a powdered explosion. Only five or six survive and mature. Tissue cultures enable more production, and this is the process biologist Brajesh Vaidya and his team at Nepal Biotech Nursery (nbn) specialise in. There isn't much that can be done to speed up the process even in lab conditions. "Anyone getting into the orchid business is in it for the long haul," says Vaidya.

In the lab, the contents of the seedpods are put in a chemical.

The individual bottles are set under 12 hours of lighting and in perfect humidity. There they go through six stages of growth before reaching the rooted stage. But if we're talking from seedpod to flowering, even a tissue culture will take four to five years. Vaidya's nbn has been exporting tissue cultures of indigenous orchids to Japan and Europe. Hybrid cultures are sold to local growers, numbering only five or six in the Valley, who grow for the local market. "South Asians seem to prefer the bright colours of hybrids for decoration while Europeans go more for the earthy tones of indigenous varieties," notes Vaidya. Orchid export is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which requires that all orchids being exported have been propagated by tissue culture.

Unfortunately, orchid smuggling is still not under control. Trafficking indigenous wild orchids is easy and truck loads are smuggled into India where false certificates are obtained for export to Europe and the US as artificially propagated plants. "If someone goes into the forest and picks an orchid for themselves, it's not such a big problem. The problem arises when someone goes into the forest, sees a beautiful orchid and then hires people to pick them by the truck loads," says Vaidya.

Nepal is home to 386 recorded varieties of orchids, and three or four more species are found every year. There are eight endemic species of orchids, found only in Nepal.



Bharat Rai (left) and his partner Kabiraj Rai working on Golden Gull Cymbidiums at their farm in Godavari.





FAN

# Floral tributes

## From agriculture to floriculture at FAN 2004

The organisers at Floriculture Association Nepal (FAN) are getting ready for Floriculture Exhibition 2004, an annual event plant and flower lovers across the Valley are waiting for. This is where those in the cut flower and nursery business, those interested in landscaping and the gardener in each of us, can all go to see what's new and in bloom from seasonal to ornamental, indoor to outdoor, tissue cultures to fruit bearing alike.

"Last year we had 54 stalls and we're hoping for more participants this year," says FAN President Minerwa Bista. In the past participants from as far and wide as Janakpur, Pokhara, Dharan and Butwal would eagerly arrive at the national exhibition. But due to the security situation, Bista expects fewer participants this year. She adds, "Plants are perishable and people don't want to risk losing their

hard work when they get stuck for hours in security checks."

"But there is good business in floriculture," admits Bista, herself the proprietor of a cut flower nursery in Kathmandu. In 2002-2003, the cut flowers was a Rs 23,730,000 business, while the nurseries together brought in over Rs 54 million. To boost the floriculture sector, FAN organises regular technical trainings in pest control, gardening, bouquet arrangement and seasonal flower management workshops. Says Bista, "Five or six years ago, Nepal imported 80 percent of our flowers from India. Now we grow about 85 percent and import 15 to 20 percent, which is during the off season. In a year or two we should be able to grow enough all our own."

(Sradhha Basnyat)

Meeting the international demands for our indigenous orchids by exporting their tissue cultures is one way to address rampant illegal export. It also makes great business sense. Orchids, once cut, last six to eight weeks in the right conditions. Cool, well-ventilated rooms with indirect light are ideal. It's a lucrative venture: one orchid stick can cost Rs 50-150, while a single rose sells for Rs 20. Rai's Orchid can't seem to keep up with the demand, even with orchid production growing by 25 percent a year.

"We want to encourage and support more people to start orchid farms. This is the best time of year for training, from January to end of March, when the orchids bloom and we harvest them," says Kabiraj who also teaches propagation techniques. There are no secrets here, Kabiraj readily gives away the formula for the soil: 60 percent cow dung and peat to the rest charcoal bits, brick chips, sand and coconut husk.

It may be taking coals to Newcastle, but in the future Rai's Orchid plans to export orchids to Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. These are countries famous for tropical orchids, but our colourful hybrid Cymbidiums add variety and are in high demand. There is also a growing market for cut flowers in the Middle East but these require



A potted Show Girl Cymbidium

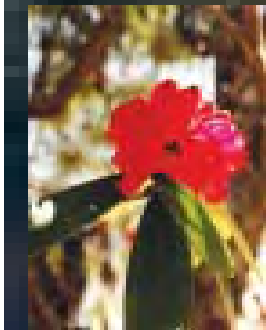
more investment for chilling rooms at customs and proper packaging.

With a growing local demand for orchids, Rai's Orchid is gearing up to address the market. Last week, the Rai duo were poring over a bunch of Golden Gull Cymbidiums in full bloom at their

Godavari farm. It's obvious that the end result has made it well worth the wait. For Kabiraj, the farm has become his life's mission. Leaning back in his lawn chair, he adds, "It's a tension-free occupation, perfect for retired life. We're independent, keep busy and it's good exercise."



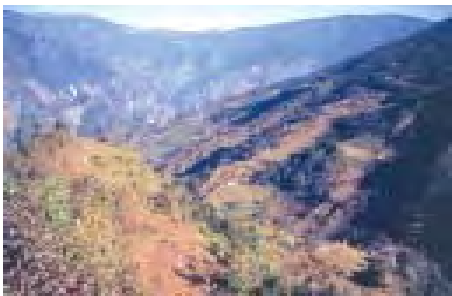




ALL PICS: PADAM GHALE

# Backdoor to Lukla

A lot has changed with trekking in Nepal, but a lot remains the same



- Bucolic countryside near Bung Gau.
- Across the Arun at Katike Pul.
- Breakfast of dhindo with the porters before another day on the trail.
- Porters traversing wheat fields near Doban Phedi.

After initial fears about the insurgency ruining the trekking industry, there is now cautious hope that it will survive. Bookings for Spring 2004 show that despite the news of global terrorism, Maoist activities and extortion along the trails, trekkers have not abandoned Nepal.

After leading a 10-day trek from Tumlingtar to Lukla recently, I have to say that the Nepali midhills are still a

**OFF THE BEATEN TREK**  
Padam Ghale



spectacular place to hike through. It is safe, and organising a trek off the main trails is not only possible, but also very fulfilling for the visitors.

Having said that, there are also things that have changed. No more will you get children greeting you at the entrance of a village, or smiling farmers waving to you from their fields as you pass by. There is a suspicion of all strangers, although things quickly get back to normal as soon as locals figure out you are trekkers. Another stark change is the absence of young men and women, who have all fled to the towns or gone abroad to work.

Except for schools and health posts, there is absolutely no government presence anywhere. After leaving Tumlingtar airfield, we did not see a single policeman or soldier until we got to Lukla. For that matter, there are not too many Maoists, either. But you are sure to meet them at checkpoints where trekkers have to pay a 'revolutionary tax' and get a receipt.

On the Tumlingtar trail, trekkers have to pay Rs 1,000 to the Makalu command and another Rs 1,000 to the Sagarmatha command. Some trekking groups don't come across Maoists at all, but it is good to be prepared and set aside that money. Once the group gets its individual receipt, it is not harassed anywhere else along the trail. Some

trekkers find this 'voluntary' tax objectionable, but others say it is no different than the Rs 2,000 they have to pay to ACAP or the \$50 they have to pay for a trekking permit in other areas of Nepal. Either way, trekkers now have to budget for the Maoist fees like they must for visa fees or government taxes.

In this new kind of trekking, you have to be careful about where you go. Be smart, 'dress down' and don't be conspicuous with your gizmos. Binoculars and cameras are sought-after items. The Maoists along the trails are mostly teenagers, polite but firm, and there is no point trying to conduct an ideological debate about the pros and cons of their method of revolution. Also, you never know when the young chap demanding your binoculars is a maobadi or a khaobadi.

The Tumlingtar-Lukla trek is your classic pre-trekking era trek. This is what Nepal was like before trekkers arrived. This is also the famous case of the goose fouling its own nest: adventure tourists are always looking for places to go where others don't go, and by going they make the new place as commonplace as the other places they have gone to.

It's not likely that 'mainstream' trekkers will be thronging to the Tumlingtar-Lukla trail this season. There are no extra high passes to traverse, no mountains up close, just a gentle walk through unspoilt villages, terraces of yellow mustard, snowbound forests ablaze with rhododendron along the high ridges. Everywhere, there is a calm and solitude that gives you the impression that the outside world is very far away indeed. Another thing: during our 10 days we didn't see a single tourist hiker outside of our group.

Tumlingtar is a one-hour flight from Kathmandu. Immediately, you senses the tropical ambience in this low valley by the Arun river. You cross the river at Katike Pul

across a 250m span suspension bridge. Most Nepali rivers flow north-south, and this trek is east-west, so it is a roller-coaster ride of steep climbs and descents from one valley to the next. That is the zen of trekking: every step you take downhill you know you have to go uphill at some later point. After a while, it is difficult to tell which is more difficult, going up or down.

Finally you reach Doban Phedi at 1,500m. Camping is usually in the school grounds. Most schools are closed since teachers have fled. There is usually a red hammer and sickle flag flying and Maoist slogans scrawled along the walls. If the porters know the villagers, trekkers can also find a house to sleep in and go native to eat dhindo and tarkari. But thanks to Maoist edicts, there is no alcohol sold openly.

Soon, you leave behind the Bahun and Chhetri villages to enter Rai and Limbu country. There are steep sections all the way to Salpha Pokhari at 3,600m, the highest point on the trail from which there are great views of Kangchenjunga to the east, Chamlang, Mera Peak and the mountains around Lukla. Everest is blocked by lesser but nearer mountains. After the pass, there is nowhere to go but down, down, down to Bung Gau at 1,300m. Then it is up again to Pangong at 2,900m where you come across the first Sherpa villages. Then, guess what, it is down again to a river, and up again to Bhasme Pass at 3,200m. From the saddle, you know you are approaching Lukla because you can see and hear the morning flights on the Dudh Kosi valley below. And that is where you find yourself the next morning after a knee-wracking descent to follow the Phaplu trail up to Lukla, or along the Dudh Kosi towards Phakding to upper Khumbu.

Lukla is civilization, with its bars, restaurants cosy lodges and an airport with a paved runway on which there are 15-20 flights from Kathmandu landing every day. ●



# Tagging along to Langtang

So near, and yet so wild

is that the terrain rises vertically from subtropical slopes above the Trisuli to alpine along the Langtang Khola right up to arctic along the moraines of the Langtang Glacier.

To protect this spectacular biodiversity, while ensuring community development goes hand in hand with the sustainable use of forest resources, this 1,710 sq km area directly north of Kathmandu Valley was designated a national park in 1976. Park warden Megh Bahadur Pandey in Dhunche feels the level of people's participation in conservation efforts is encouraging. The 34 villages within the park plan and manage local conservation themselves through forest user groups and committees.

"Before, the army used to look after the national park. Now we look after it ourselves," says Chiring Phincho Tamang, who is the chairperson of the local forest user group in Syabru. He is cutting pipes for drinking water taps the community is building as he talks to us. Villagers can only collect dried branches and fallen trees for firewood and only cut trees for timber with a national park permit. Wildlife populations have increased, he adds, and some like the wild boar and langur have gone out of control.

"If we save the forests now, our children and grandchildren will have them too. And tourists will come," says Dorje Namgyal, secretary of the user group. But there are still some serious challenges. Namgyal

estimates only a third of villagers understand the importance of conservation. "They feel the laws are too strict. It's difficult for those with no money to buy timber to build houses."

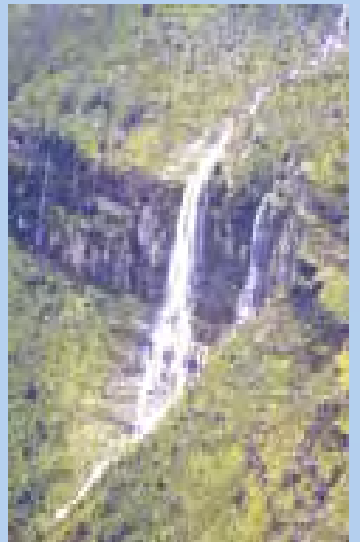
Still, Tamang and Namgyal feel these are issues they could resolve among themselves if only they were given more decision-making power. "If we were given full responsibility, there would be more conservation."

After a year-and-a-half as park warden, Pandey thinks the ultimate challenge is poverty. "People depend on the forest for their livelihood, their immediate needs and demands," he says. "Survival is still bigger than conservation."

The park has 54,000 inhabitants within a 420 sq km buffer zone established in 1998. Higher up on the trail there is no electricity, and this puts a strain on the forest since firewood is still the primary means for cooking.

In Langtang village itself, Karma Tamang's Eco Guest House is lit by power from a microhydro plant down the hill. He has solar cells on his roof for backup. Passive solar panels heat water for the showers. Tamang has also devised a mixture of firewood and yak dung as an efficient fuel: the inside of the dung remaining hot like charcoal.

The reduction in the army's presence within the park



boundaries hasn't meant an increase in Maoist activity, nor has there been an increase in poaching, according to game scout Bom Bahadur Shrestha in Ghode Tabela.

"If anything, poaching is a lot less since people don't walk with guns or even keep them at home for fear of being called Maoists. Security is in fact stricter," he tells us. From his post Shrestha continues to monitor use of forest resources, collecting timber permits and going on regular patrols.

Langtang has seen a sharp decrease in trekking traffic. Two years ago, 13,500 trekkers came here, last year just 6,000. This has impacted community development projects like education, health, road works and plantations which depend on tourism income for funds. Perhaps the fact that there are so few tourists in Langtang is in itself an added attraction for those who want to get away from the beaten track. ●

KUNDA DIXIT

**SRADDHA BASNYAT** in KENJIN GOMBA

**A** lone porter ferries egg crates stacked several feet high. An occasional trekking group shuffles by. It is quiet along the Langtang trail this season, the closest really wild trekking area to Kathmandu.

Foot traffic in Langtang has slowed by half in the last few years because of fears of violence along the Trisuli Valley, but up here in the national park itself you are back in that timeless Nepal of the old days. A serene and silent land of sky and snow.

Right now is the best time to be in Langtang, the hills red and white with rhododendron. Most of the snow is gone and the days are warm.

It is still easy to get to

Langtang. Public buses leave daily for Dhunche along the bone-rattling 7-8 hour bus ride to Syabru Besi. Private jeeps can also be hired for \$100. The road is gravel, and was completely washed off near Ramche in a huge landslide last monsoon. Once in Dhunche, guides and porters are readily available and the lodge owners are happy to arrange them for you. It's a gradual climb, so if you pack wisely, you can carry your own backpack. There are enough lodges along the way, and there is no need to carry tents.

Langtang National Park is home to 250 bird species and 32 species of mammals including wild dogs, thar, ghorals, serows, musk deer, red pandas, black bears and snow leopards. The reason for this diversity





PADAM GHALE

# Abandon the gym for the Himalaya

Trekking is harder than the treadmill, and the rewards infinitely better

JANE HODSON

I was puffing and panting and my sweat reeked of Nepal's staple meal of dal bhat. This mountain hike had better be worth it. I plodded onwards and upwards—my blood thumping a tempo almost loud enough to perforate my eardrums. Every muscle cried in discord.

This was the third day of a week's trekking in the Himalayas and far from being a sublime Julie Andrews gambol in Shangri-la, it was a gruelling endeavour.

But I was confident it would pay

off—and not just for the view. "High altitude provokes a hormonal response, which causes red blood cell production to be increased," says Chris Walton, head of specialist training at the Third Space, a health and fitness club in London. "As a result, the body's oxygen levels are raised, accelerating capacity for work. Furthermore, the lack of oxygen in the air means that physical work is harder. The body is forced to go anaerobic, which in turn uses more calories." In pedestrian speak, exercise at altitude increases fitness and the body's ability to burn fat:

hiking up a trail can burn up to 600 calories an hour and double that amount at higher altitudes. Seven days' trekking in the Himalayas, I reasoned, would be the ideal way to get fit and detox as well.

Who needs a gym when there is Nepal? But as I discovered, trekking is much harder than a workout on the treadmill. Our trek for two—accompanied by a guide and two porters—took us from Lumle, around 75 miles west of Kathmandu, to Tikhedhunga, finishing with white-water rafting on the Seti river, before returning to

Kathmandu. Apart from the first couple of nights, when accommodation was in relatively luxurious lodges with ensuite bathrooms, we stayed in tea-houses and slept in sleeping bags.

We walked for between four and seven hours a day, the third day was the worst as my muscles stiffened and I fought for breath. But at least I was eating healthily. I usually took the local option: a bowl of potent garlic soup, followed by dal bhat which is apparently perfect for steady energy release, and momos. The food is a delicious fusion of spices and textures. I'd chosen not to eat meat in order to avoid stomach problems, and the ensuing combination meant that I was on an almost toxin-free diet.

Only two elements of my daily nourishment let me down: a glass or two of beer to celebrate the end of each day's achievement and a never-ending supply of Mars bars—not a particular favourite, but a perfect boost when energy levels are lagging and there are mountains to be conquered. On the fourth day, something miraculous happened. As if a monumental hurdle had been negotiated suddenly, my body began to work to a rhythm. On the ascents, my heart still thudded and breaths were short, but the lactic acid in my legs was beginning to subside and I noticed a marked increase in energy and fitness.

The climb through verdant rhododendron jungle now took us high above the paddy fields. The rich textures around me, the screeches of parakeets and earthy odours combined to deliver a heady sensual stew. With each pure breath, I felt stronger, more aware and energised as we advanced

through the clouds. The thin air seemed to wash away a year's worth of stress. In the foreground, bamboo, rhododendron and pine mingled, while high across the valley stood the majestic snow-capped mountains.

Our mile-long descent was painful and arduous. For six hours we trudged down 3,500 steps and after a while the jarring thuds brought on a thumping headache. But no matter how the muscles ached, how the heart pounded, how the injuries played up, if you sat for a moment all the hardship simply floated away.

Seven days from first pulling on my trekking boots, we were romping back to Pokhara, where we headed straight for the Shangri-La Hotel and its tranquil ornate gardens, complete with horizon pool and coy carp mini-moat. Most important, there were massages to be had and my muscles seemed to sigh with pleasure at the first deep-tissued, Ayurvedic touch. I did feel healthier: my breathing had deepened and I was not as exhausted at the end of the day. On that first night at lower altitude, I slept deeply and awoke refreshed.

We spent the final night of our trip at Dwarika's Hotel in Kathmandu. Back home, I'm toned and honed with thighs like steel. My belt is fastening a notch tighter and I am feeling fitter, healthier and more revitalised than I have since the days of compulsory school sports. I've lost 4lbs and my fitness levels are up 22 percent. I've been walking an hour to work instead of getting the bus and there's a marked spring in my step. Trekking is definitely the answer to post-Christmas sluggishness and the best way to banish those January blues. ●

(c The Telegraph)





Few would argue that the moon is more wondrous and enchanting than when it is near the horizon, appearing closer and looming larger than when it is high in the sky. But this is an illusion, the ‘Moon Illusion’, to be precise. The distance traveled by light reflected from the moon to the eye of an observer is essentially the same regardless of the moon’s elevation. A similar illusion is observed for the setting sun and

SCIENCE WATCH

Maurice Henderson



for celestial distances between star points at different elevations.

But the Moon Illusion is not only captivating to behold; it also happens to be perhaps the oldest unsolved problem in science. References to it can be found on clay tablets from the royal library of Nineveh and Babylon, dating from before the sixth century BC, as well as in a collection of Chinese legends ascribed to Lieh Tzu dating from the fifth century BC. Many of history’s leading scientists and mathematicians have analyzed the phenomenon: da Vinci, Kepler and Descartes to name but a few.

For most of recorded history, the illusion was thought to be a consequence of physical processes. For example, Aristotle in the third century BC and Ptolemy in the second century AD incorrectly attributed the illusion to the magnifying properties of the atmosphere. Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham) related the illusion to the flattened appearance of the dome of the sky.

In the nineteenth century, it became clear that the Moon Illusion is psychological, a consequence of the cognitive processes underlying the human brain’s visual space perception. Many theories have since been offered to explain the illusion, but there is still little agreement among researchers.

Most modern explanations treat the illusion as a static phenomenon, in which a



Moon rising from behind Everest (I) looks larger than when directly above Macchapuchre (below)

circumstances in which it evolved? Clearly, motion was an essential feature. Our visual systems evolved in an environment that contained (mostly) rigid moving objects. Objects that move radially, ie, directly toward or away from a viewer, produce a stimulus on the eye that is continuously increasing or decreasing in size. Our visual system automatically transforms such changing stimulus inputs into objects that appear to be rigid—ie, unchanging in perceived size—but moving radially in three-dimensional space. Call this mechanism a type of kinetic form of SDIH.

Now, how would such a perceptual system respond to the stimulus of the Moon Illusion—a stimulus that changes only in the elevation of the moon over the ground? The perceived distance of the moon would be determined by contextual stimulus information from the ground and the horizon—when the moon is low, it would appear close (that is, at or near the apparent distance of the horizon) and when the moon is high in the sky, it would appear to be at a far greater distance.

The perceived size of the moon would be determined by the kinetic SDIH, which produces the perception of rigid objects moving radially when stimulus size changes continuously. Accordingly, when the object appears to be at different distances, the perceived size of the object must change. This makes the moon that appears closer (i.e., the moon at the horizon) also appear larger than the moon that appears farther away.

Understanding the perceptual system in evolutionary terms makes it possible to uncover the processes that determine our awareness of objects moving in space. Presented with an anomalous stimulus such as the moon, this system has graced humanity with a sublime illusion about both the object’s size and its distance. ● (Project Syndicate)

Maurice Hershenson is Professor of psychology at Brandeis University.

# The Moon Illusion

We are no closer to understanding why the moon looks bigger when it is low in the sky

stationary observer views a fixed illuminated object over a ground. The perceived size of the moon is determined by two factors: the physical extent of the light falling on the eye—also known as the angular subtense or the visual angle—and the distance information provided by the ground. Some theorists include in this formulation the perceived distance of the moon (how far it appears to be from an observer).

The relationships between the stimulus (visual angle) and the perceived size and distance of the moon are summarised by the so-called “static size-distance invariance hypothesis” (SDIH): stimulus determines the ratio of perceived size to perceived distance. The information from the ground fixes the unique values of each variable in this ratio.

The SDIH is sometimes assumed to be a fundamental law of visual perception. But it is this relationship that makes the Moon Illusion such a puzzle, because applying the SDIH requires that the moon appear farther away if it appears large, and close if it appears small. This is also why the illusion has sometimes been called ‘paradoxical’.

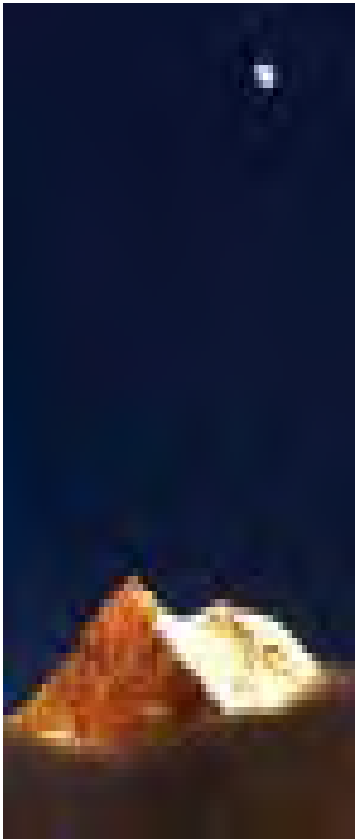
Since observation contradicts

the hypothesis, modern explanations of the Moon Illusion have proposed a variety of changes to the SDIH. One modification allows perceived distance to be evoked simultaneously by different behavioral responses. Thus, the moon may appear more distant to people who say: “The moon looks close.”

Other explanations exclude perceived distance. Verbal statements about the perceived distance of the moon are described as inferences based on perceived size rather than descriptions of experience: “The moon looks big so it must be close.”

Other researchers have gone beyond the SDIH altogether, substituting a perceptual outcome-perceived visual angle-for the stimulus input. Unlike the SDIH, this implies a purely psychological relationship. But none of these theories answers the age-old question: what accounts for the simultaneous perception of a large and near moon?

I have proposed a solution that approaches the illusion from a different starting point. I begin with the nature of the perceptual system: What were the



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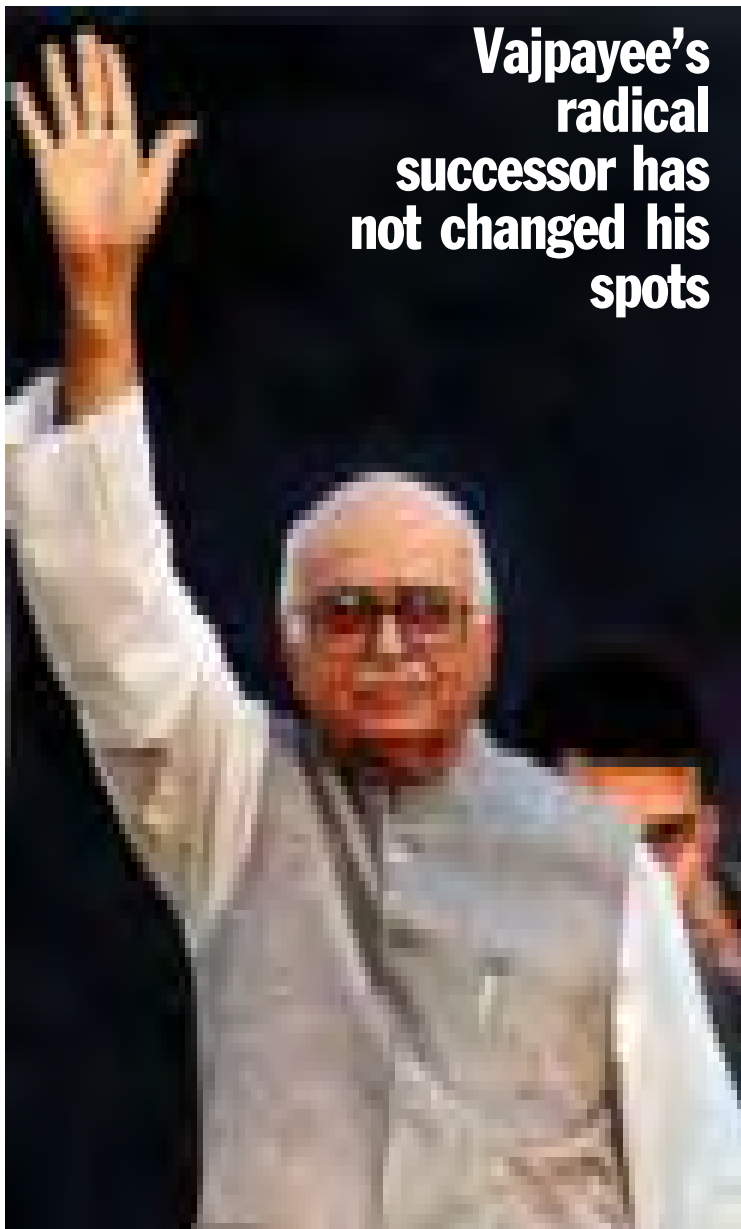
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**Vajpayee's  
radical  
successor has  
not changed his  
spots**



NEW DELHI, 8 March—The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), leader of India's ruling coalition, has launched a new stratagem in its election campaign which rakes up its trademark issues of religious and ethnic identities.

**COMMENT**  
Praful Bidwai



Starting 10 March, Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani will begin a month-long 12,000km tour, criss-crossing over a fifth of India's 545 parliamentary constituencies. The planned 'rath-yatra' (chariot procession) has evoked fears among BJP opponents and the

180 million people of India's religious minorities. There are understandable fears that Advani's bellicose Hindu-nationalist rhetoric could provoke violence and distort the democratic nature of the Indian electorate's choice of parliament in April and May. Advani's first procession, in September and October 1990, focused on the Hindu god Ram and demanded that India's Muslims "surrender" an Ayodhya site where, the BJP claimed, a mosque was erected in 1568 on the ruins of a temple dedicated to Ram. Advani stirred up anti-Muslim hatred (there are some 140 million Muslims among India's 1 billion people) and left a

# Hindu warrior back in his chariot

trail of blood. The mosque's razing two years later was based on Advani's militant rhetoric. The demolition was a grievous attack on India's secular foundations and the multicultural, multi-religious identity of its society, sending shockwaves through the country and generating even more violence. The latest 'yatra' plans show the BJP has not changed its spots. By aggressively promoting Advani, they accelerate his succession to Vajpayee.

Advani is now more concerned with projecting himself as a firebrand on his way to moderation, so he is unlikely to foment violence brazenly. However, there is little doubt that the BJP is repositioning itself through his stewardship. The BJP's new game plan is complex, but no less devious than in 1990.

In a recent 'India Today' opinion poll, Advani's acceptance rating as a potential prime minister was a minuscule two percent compared to opposition leader Sonia Gandhi's 23 percent and Vajpayee's 47. The BJP hopes to keep Vajpayee as its star campaigner and use the 47 percent rating to bolster Advani's unfavourable public image. Its appeal to people is to vote for Vajpayee—only to install Advani in power.

Advani is doing some fancy footwork to define the purpose and inspiration of his 'yatra'. He says it is meant to "capture the emerging reality and strengthen the resolve of a resurgent India".

However, he also says there is a "conceptual and emotional link" between his new project and his Ram 'rath-yatra' of 1990, which was launched in a Toyota van garishly decorated as an ancient mythological chariot.

Underlying this is the BJP's desperation to retain its 182 seats in the just-dissolved lower house of parliament. There are indications that 20 to 25 percent of its sitting members of parliament might not get re-elected. The BJP and its allies are unlikely to do as well as they did in the last elections in major states like Bihar, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Haryana. It is unclear if they can make up this loss through wins in Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state with 80 seats. The BJP is trying to mop up all the support it can—from the upper middle class enamoured with Vajpayee's neoliberal economic policies, to the small-town trader strongly driven by anti-Muslim hatred, to the storm troopers loyal to the BJP's extremist affiliates.

The launching of the 'yatra' signifies changes in power balances between different components of the ruling National Democratic Alliance, whose original strength of 24 parties stands depleted by one-third. The BJP did not consult its allies, most of whom do not share the BJP's Hindu-supremacist ideology, before announcing the 'yatra'.

More important, the 'yatra' shows changed power equations within the BJP's top hierarchy. It

signifies that the weight of the hard-line lobby of organisational apparatchiks has increased vis-a-vis its parliamentary wing partly due to growing recognition that, unlike the energetic, somewhat younger, more aggressive Advani, Vajpayee is old and in poor health, and might not survive the duration of his term if re-elected. Advani is himself 78 and may be under pressure and in a hurry to accelerate the succession, which has been carefully planned by the BJP. Two years ago, it created a special office for Advani's post of deputy prime minister, for which there is no constitutional sanction.

Last June, party president M Venkaiah Naidu declared that the BJP had two great leaders: 'vikas-purush' (development man) Vajpayee and 'loh-purush' (iron man) Advani. This produced a sharp, peevish rebuke from Vajpayee. Naidu abjectly apologised. The same lobby is now reasserting itself by diluting the BJP's exclusively Vajpayee-centric election campaign with a modified twin-mascots strategy.

Advani's elevation to the position of a major campaigner in his own right gives the lie to the theory that the party is becoming a mainstream organisation and that the experience of power has induced sobriety, maturity and moderation in it. However, this always was wishful thinking. Because of its visceral, radical Hindu supremacism, the BJP is unlikely to become moderate as its Gujarat pogrom proved in a gory way. Two years on, it is no closer to moderation. ● (IPS)

## Aiding South Asia

**STEFANIA BIANCHI** in BRUSSELS

**T**he EU must increase aid to tackle poverty in south Asia, says a new report, Poverty in South Asia: Civil Society Perspectives'.

Prepared by the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), a regional network of NGOs, the report says south Asia receives only 10 percent of EU aid despite having 40 percent of the world's absolute poor.

"While the EU debates the focus of its development assistance, its trade and other external policies undermine attempts to tackle poverty within the region," said Arjun Karki, coordinator of SAAPE.

South Asia is home to 1.2 billion people living on less than a dollar a day. Nearly 38 percent of the adult population is illiterate and 15 percent does not live to the age of 40. Some 328 million south Asians are undernourished, 205 million are denied access to safe water and 614 million are

deprived of proper sanitation facilities.

"The EU has always had stronger links with Africa and politicians now say that economic development is better in Asia than in Africa, so Asia can help itself," said Pieter van Veenen from the Dutch group, Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS). The report says that most internal conflicts and terrorism in the region are a direct result of deprivation, discrimination and poverty.

"Today in south Asia, a huge amount of resources goes to fight the elusive enemy, terrorism, while the evident enemies—poverty and want—have been left to grow more dangerous than ever before," said Karki. "The EU should help us channel their resources so that the root causes of violence can be addressed."

SAAPE is disappointed with the EU's budget proposals announced earlier this month. The European Commission's proposal for financing EU activities from 2007 to 2013 includes a 38 percent increase in the resources dedicated to



external relations. Although details have not yet been published, the Commission has indicated only the security component that would need increased resources. SAAPE says this will finance strategic security and

## A new report presses the EU for more contributions

leave other areas of EU external policies such as development cooperation and humanitarian aid with little additional investment.

The activists want more EU funding so that the region can meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals for eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and other serious diseases, improving environmental sustainability and building a global partnership for development. Specific goals have been set for 2015.

SAAPE says that restructuring of the European Commission under the new European Constitution may intensify the problem.

"The financial perspectives proposal does not question the existing level of efforts in humanitarian aid," spokesperson for development commissioner Poul Nielson, Jean-Charles Ellermann-Kingombe said in response. "Of course we are not able to vouch for the political priorities of the next commission." ● (IPS)





# The rise of Shi’a Petrolistan

West Asia’s Shi’as are rising up against Sunnis and the West, and oil is their weapon

The hideous bombings of the Shi’a shrines in Karbala will neither change nor obscure a powerful new fact of life in the Middle East. For now that the dust of the Iraq War has settled, it is clear that the Shi’a have emerged, blinking in the

**COMMENT**  
Mai Yamani



sunlight, as the unexpected winners. Governments that oppressed the Shi’a for decades may still be in denial, but the terrorists who planted those bombs are not. They recognise, as the Shi’a themselves now do, that across the Gulf, Shi’a Muslims are gaining in political power, and are awakened to their ability both to organise themselves and to the gift that lies literally under their feet: oil.

After years of repression under Saddam Hussein, Iraq’s Shi’a are tasting freedom. They’ve awakened to the accident of geography that has placed the world’s major oil supplies in areas where they form the majority - Iran, the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and southern Iraq. Welcome to the new commonwealth of “Petrolistan”.

The new-found power of Shi’a Muslims in this volatile region represents a major challenge both to the old Sunni ruling establishments and to the United States. The years of Shi’a subservience are over.

So what are the Shi’a planning? What is their inspiration? Will bearded men in turbans and veiled women rule them, or will we see suits and high heels? If they want democracy, will anyone recognise it as such?

It wasn’t until 1979 that the Shi’a first appeared on Western

radar screens, emerging in Iran at the head of a violent revolution that murdered thousands and dispatched the Shah into history. In Western eyes, the Shi’a became the hostile and militant face of Islam. Their Sunni counterparts, even the most fundamentalist Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, appeared tame in comparison. But the terrorist attacks on America of 11 September, 2001 rewrote that idea for good.

The hijackers were all Sunni. Their hosts and backers, the Taliban, were also Sunni, as are all the prisoners at America’s military base turned prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Sunni Muslims dominated Saddam’s Ba’athist regime—and the so-called Sunni Triangle in central Iraq is the site of the fiercest hostility to the US-led occupation and its local supporters. In the space of but a few months, Sunni Muslims have replaced the Shi’a as the biggest threat to the West and to international security.

For their part, Shi’a minorities claim to welcome democracy. But then minorities always do, because it allows them to claim religious freedom and express their cultural identity. In Saudi Arabia, the Shi’a are at the forefront of those welcoming democratic change and participation. Although they constitute only 20 percent of the total Saudi population, they form 75 percent of the population in the oil-rich eastern region.

Saudi Arabia’s Shi’a have suffered discrimination in the military, in high government positions and most significantly, in the oil industry, where they have been excluded since the 1980s. This systematic exclusion of the Shi’a is supported by the Wahhabi religious establishment and legitimised by numerous *fatwa* denouncing them as

heretics. In Bahrain, the Shi’a form 75 percent of the population and have been keen on the reforms initiated by King Hamad Al-Khalifah. They have opted for political rule by the Sunni minority rather than associating with Iran’s form of government. But the new generation of Bahraini Shi’a are more militant and their views are increasingly echoed by their Shi’a counterparts in Saudi Arabia.

It was the threat of Shi’a militancy which led the region’s rulers to set up the Gulf Co-operation Council in 1981, and attempt to pool their strengths. That move was too little too late. There was a coup attempt in Bahrain that same year, which came hard on the heels of a Shi’a uprising in Saudi Arabia the year before.

Today, Iran no longer exports revolution. Its experiment with an Islamic form of democracy is now primarily an internal affair. In any case, none of the Iraqi Ayatollahs who were once exiled in Iran seem to have any inclination to adopt the Iranian model.

So far the Shi’a in Iraq have been relatively quiet, watching the de-Ba’athification process and biding their time. But since the capture of Saddam Hussein, they have become increasingly assertive. It is on the insistence of the Shi’a that the US has had to continually rewrite its blueprint for Iraq.

After being the region’s losers for decades, the Shi’a now have the chance to redress the balance, settle old scores and control the wealth of Petrolistan. But they won’t succeed without a struggle, as the odious bombings in Karbala demonstrate. ● (Project Syndicate)

Mai Yamani is an author and Research Fellow at the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

## Putin : Tsar or doge?

There is little doubt that Putin will be re-elected, but is he master of the system or its prisoner?

NINA L KHRUSHCHEVA

Two practical questions can be asked of any political system: First, what distinguishes the political parties? Second, who is in charge?

For a while in postcommunist Russia, the answers were blindingly clear: parties were divided between those nostalgic for Soviet times and those who wanted reform. Who was in charge? The president.

After 12 years of transition, the answer to the first question has blurred. With the Communist Party in terminal decline, ideologies are vanishing. Indeed, anybody hoping for an obvious clash of left and right during the recent presidential election campaign was bound to be disappointed, because the answer to the second question is even more emphatic today: President Putin’s re-election was never in doubt. This president is very much in charge.

Putin’s all-encompassing popularity, which is genuine, and his blurring of all political dividing lines has given him an unassailable position. Many bemoan this state of affairs, but his ascendancy might be less malign than it seems.

Russia’s size, the poverty of its infrastructure and the disarray of its bureaucracy limit Putin’s power. Within those limits, he uses his power relentlessly. The impression Putin’s presidency creates is of autocracy punctuated by elections.

Autocracy, not dictatorship. After four years of a presidency supposedly devoted to forging a “dictatorship of law,” the rule of law in Russia remains weak and property rights ill defined. A solid middle class has yet to emerge, as is a resilient civil society.

So Putin’s authoritarianism creeps along, but by Russian standards it is far from being hideously creepy. In some things, indeed, he deserves the thanks of all Russians. He has consigned the Communists to Trotsky’s dustbin of history. Now splintering, some seem willing to stop pandering to Bolshevik ghosts. That is good for Russia. Welcome to the republic.

Putin has also not turned the clock back on economic reform. Indeed, the economy has mostly boomed under his stewardship—another reason ordinary Russians like him.

Where Putin has failed is in fostering democratic governance. The question is not just whether he and his ex-KGB cronies muzzle the media and jail their opponents. No, the real flaw in Putin’s rule is that his power is personal, not based on the support of a political party.

The central issue in Russian politics is not the battle for votes. More significant by far is the competition for power that takes place in the bowels of the presidency.

The emergence of viable political parties requires a strong parliament. But, because Russia’s presidency is so powerful, the Duma is largely a squabbling-shop and a fixer’s paradise. At best, it is a safety valve for democracy rather than an engine of it.

Of course, there is a big pro-presidential majority party in the Duma. But that is its flaw: it stands only for the president. What he wants, it votes for. But what Russia needs is political parties that stand for something other than their boss’s will.

It helps Putin that reformist parties inspire little confidence. The reformist “Union of Right Forces,” led by Boris Nemtsov and Anatoly Chubais, destroyed itself last December, failing to gain a seat in the Duma. Instead of visiting Russians struggling to manage their difficult lives, Nemtsov and Chubais touted themselves as modern men flying about in private jets and fiddling with laptops, emphasising the distance between themselves and ordinary Russians. Tin political ears deserve defeat.

Putin understands instinctively that Russia needs elements of democracy, if only to distinguish the new Russia from the old, and to let the odd gust of healthy fresh air in. Unchallenged in his second and last term, will he retain even that slight democratic instinct? ● (Project Syndicate)

Nina L Khrushcheva teaches international affairs at New School University and is the author of a forthcoming book on Vladimir Nabokov.





# An active monarchy isn't unconstitutional



Dinbandhu Aryal in *Rajdhani*, 7 March

राजधानी

One day after King Gyanendra issued a 10-point instruction to the government for the welfare of the people of the far and mid-western regions on 1 March, the three major political parties reportedly dubbed the king's move as additional evidence of an active monarchy. A search has become necessary for a fair and widely acceptable argument that would answer these questions: Is the king active or not? Should he be active or not? Does the constitution stop the king from being active?

It is also necessary to use the pronouncements of the Nepali Congress, Nepali Congress (Democratic), UML and Nepal Sadhabana Party about what is constitutional. A UML leader has charged the king with speaking "sugarcoated words" while throttling democracy. He also claimed that the constitution does not prohibit talking, debating and sloganeering of republicanism.

If he based his claim on his party's manifesto, he must understand that his party's rules are not applicable to other parties and citizens at large. We don't expect our children in colleges and universities to get brainwashed by the manifestoes of Maoists and the UML. We cannot give those parties such freedom. The constitution has clearly banned sloganeering of republicanism.

The letter and spirit of the constitution does not stop the king from being active. The words have eroded and the meanings have changed because of the attitude and behaviour of politicians. It is they who ushered in vices like financial irregularities, horse-trading of the members of parliament, vulgar activities that give a bad twist to the words in the constitution.

If the king interferes in the good work of the people's representatives, if he snatches the rights of the poor for the benefit of those in the palace and if he does not become sensitive for the safety of the people, then definitely he can be called a tyrant and autocrat. But why shouldn't the king be even allowed to feel for the people suffering as a result of bad governance over the years? After looking at the preamble of the constitution, the leaders must understand that they prepared the constitution as the "king's tillers", to borrow Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa's words. The king is the patron of the constitution. Article 27 (3) of the constitution says that the king, and not the parliament, is the guardian of the constitution. The same article does not allow a referendum. To assert his point that as a prime minister he should be allowed to dissolve parliament, Sher Bahadur Deuba had once argued citing Article 31 of the constitution that the king's decision could not be challenged. Now that he is out of power, his party is engaged in an anti-king movement.

Nine years ago, the supreme commander of the 1990 "People's Movement" Ganesh Man Singh and CPN (UML) leader Man Mohan Adhikari had opined that the king should have rejected then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's recommendation to dissolve the parliament. Did Sher Bahadur Deuba, who dissolved parliament during the state of emergency saying that he would hold elections but failed to do so, abide by the constitution?

These are the questions the constitution drafters, most of whom are currently engaged in anti-king agitation, need to answer: Why was the king given the executive power in article 35 (1) of the constitution? Why was the king, through article 36 (5) authorised to sack the prime minister even after a vote of no-confidence against the premier is passed?

## Foreign banks

Space Time, 7 March

स्पेसटाइम टैमिक

Nepal Rastra Bank has allowed foreign banks to open branches or contact offices in Nepal. The permission came after the government introduced the new Financial Institution Ordinance to amend laws related to banks and financial institutions.

"In order to further enhance the present competitive environment in Nepal's banking sector, branches of foreign banks and contact offices of renowned international banks are being allowed to operate in Nepal," says the new ordinance. But it prohibits any foreign bank or financial institution allowed to operate in Nepal to go for a joint venture with any other bank or finance company. In the process of getting the membership of the World Trade Organisation, Nepal made a commitment that it would allow foreign banks and financial institutions to operate after 2008. Before this, foreign banks were only allowed to do business in partnership with Nepali investors.

The amended Act also allows the banks to issue shares. But the Act also prohibits the same facility to the banks that have been operating under joint venture partnerships.

The new Act authorises foreign banks and financial institutions to inspect their branch and contact offices after authorisation from Nepal Rastra Bank. Acts including Agricultural Development Bank Act, Banijya Bank Act, Financial Company Act, Nepal Industrial Development Corporation Act and Development Bank Act have been amalgamated into one new Act that categorises financial institutions into four classes. Under the new provision, banks and financial institutions can be upgraded if they perform better,

earning more benefits. But if they fail to meet the conditions set by the Nepal Rastra Bank, they will be demoted. The new Financial Act prohibits withdrawals and transfers from bank deposits belonging to people and institutions involved in tourism. Another provision authorises the government to freeze any account under investigation.

## No more patience

Sher Singh in *Sanghu*, 8 March

सोङ्घु

Maoist leader Prachanda believes that mistakes can be corrected. Without doubting the Maoists' intentions, he thinks there is a chance to address the shortcomings of a fullscale war. But the way the Maoist militants have repeatedly made mistakes only proves that they lack all good intentions. Why is this happening? The Maoists themselves have to analyse their own actions and make improvements. News of their cruelty against the public is splashed across the newspapers every day. Even then, it doesn't seem to matter to them. This indifference to public opinion has been apparent since the start of the 'People's War'.

Instead of reducing crimes against ordinary citizens, the Maoists are making it worse for them. Take Ramechap for

instance, where two innocent children lost their lives from the explosion of a bomb the Maoists left behind. A civilian died in an ambush set at Dhanauli of Banke. Hundreds of villagers of Kailali were forced to live in the jungles to escape Maoist oppression. About 400 women were abducted from a village in Accham for not supporting the Maoists. And there are many similar incidents that the Maoists can, under no circumstances, justify as being for the public good.

There is also a growing feeling of regret among Maoist members for their wrong actions, but they give priority to militancy over politics. Their mentor, Mao Zedong, always said the relationship between the people and a communist is like that between water and a fish, between soil and a flower. Our Maoists seem to have forgotten that. If they had followed Mao, the people would have wholeheartedly supported the Maoists. But the situation is just the opposite. If the people's war keeps on at this rate, then it will have to face a large-scale counter-revolution. There is evidence of growing anarchy within the ranks. The Maoists should admit this, otherwise it will look like the actions have leadership sanction. For how long will the masses remain patient and not suspect their real motives?



MOHAN MAINALI



- Radio news : Labourer's family starves due to banda  
Injured person's condition worsens when unable to reach hospital  
Students' future uncertain  
Public life comes to a grinding halt
- Maoists : Wow! A successful banda!

राजधानी *Rajdhani*, 7 March

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"The media is helping to boost the Maoists' sagging morale."

Minister for Information & Communication and Home Minister, Kamal Thapa, in *Kantipur*, March 11



Bhojpur attack  
.....  
Desbantar, 7 March

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa calls the massive Maoist attack in Bhojpur an ‘ordinary and inevitable’ incident that cost the lives of 32 security personnel. Such light-hearted treatment of the huge tragedy has already demoralised the security forces, says an army source. “It’s irresponsible to call such a huge incident an ordinary event,” says former Inspector General of Police, Dhruba Bahadur Pradhan. But this was no ordinary attack. The Maoists had been planning this for a long time and news of the attack had already spread, which was the reason all of them were absent from their offices: Major Hari Bahadur Basnet (the army division chief of the district headquarters), DSP Suresh KC (the chief of district police office) and the chief district officer were all out of the district. The Bhojpur incident shows that the security agencies have been careless. There was no high security alert or preparedness despite prior knowledge of an imminent attack. Sources say that the main reason for this tragedy was lack of countermeasures despite this knowledge. The incident is a reminder of the one that occurred in Aiselukharka on 22 February which left three security personnel dead and 18 injured. “This was the same group which also attacked

Bhojpur,” says the source. The only difference was that the Maoists were defeated and pushed back after the forces launched attacks from night vision helicopters.

Telephone  
.....  
Samacharpatra, March 6

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Solukhumbu—Maya Magar had to walk for one whole day with her child on her back to reach the telecom office to try and call her mother in Myagdi. The next day she stood in a huge queue, only to be told that the call could not get through and was asked to come the next day. Her story is typical of many other Solu villagers who have to suffer long journeys just to make a short phone call. Since the Maoists destroyed the repeater towers in Patale and Jubu, all phone lines in villages here are cut. There used to be 170 telephones, now the district has only three lines in Salleri, Namche and Lukla. Large crowds gather at the government’s telecom offices and most of the time a lot of people are unlucky and they have spend money to lodge for the night and wait for their turn the next day. “I have to walk for three days just to call Kathmandu, I have no choice,” says Gyanu Koirala from Sotang. The villagers have to pray for a good weather whenever they leave home. The solar-powered phones do not work on a cloudy day.

Sad leaving Nepal

Finnish Charge d’Affaires Asko Luukkainen in Space Time, 9 March

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक

One of the most unforgettable things about my stay in Nepal has been the terrorised faces of Nepalis. I witnessed that terror myself when I visited Dhading district a few days ago. We could see how fear had gripped the local people because of a roadside bomb planted by Maoist rebels.

I have always worried about the obstacles Nepal’s development has had to face and the state’s increased investment in security due to the Maoist insurgency. The killings of political workers and critics by Maoist rebels are deplorable. I have serious reservations about the Maoists’ sabotage, destroying development infrastructure and terrorising people.

If the rebels stop terrorism, the government can call them for peace talks. They must understand that dialogue is the best solution for them as well. It’s not just me, but all foreigners in Nepal dislike the abuse of students as political tools and the repeated shutdowns and strikes. I have had personal experience of how harmful bandas can be. But those who have distracted students from their studies and have been organising bandas do not seem to understand the gravity of the situation.

Yet another sad issue is the lack of

consensus among political parties. They have expressed a commitment for consensus, but don’t seem to be able to achieve it. Efforts must be made to manage disagreement and different opinions logically. The political culture needs to be developed in such a way that parties with different opinions can stand under the same roof.

We, as a donor country, are also troubled by the lack of an elected body. For Finnish-aided projects, there must be elected representatives. This is why our development funds have not been completely utilised. In such a situation, we suggest that the general and local elections must be held at the earliest and that all political parties including the Maoists should come for peaceful political contest.

The deteriorating human rights situation in Nepal is yet another serious issue. The EU has already urged the government and the Maoists to endorse the human rights accord prepared by the Nation Human Rights Commission. If the human rights situation continues to deteriorate at the present rate, Nepal will not only have its image tarnished, but will also lose international cooperation and good will. In the context of geopolitical influence in Nepal, India definitely comes in the picture. After it recently handed over two Maoist leaders to Nepal, India has appeared to be serious toward the Maoist insurgency.







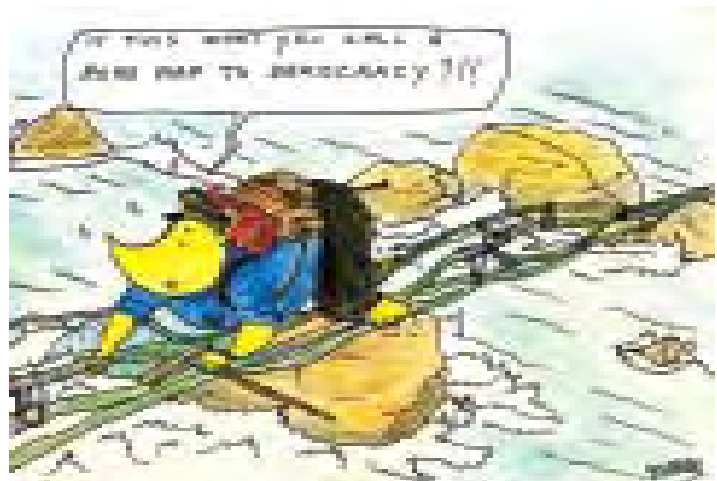
# Norbu's neo-thangkas

Even though he is barely heard of in Nepal, artist Tenzin Norbu is well known throughout creative circles in Europe. At the age of 33, this Dolpo painter's work can be found in museums around Europe as well as in many private collections across the world. Coming from five generations of thannga painters, Norbu got bored with the rigidity of this traditional scroll painting style at an early age. He began experimenting and this lead to a mixture between the traditional style and his own vivid expressionism. Rather than having a central focus, like in normal thangkas, Norbu's paintings come together to tell an epic. "To me, a painting should be about movement," says Norbu. "A painting or even a sketch is just another medium to tell a story and capture the imagination. That is one reason why I don't like still art. I prefer paintings that convey motion and energy." These traits are clearly seen in Norbu's portrayal of the scenery and lifestyles of his native Dolpo region in an exhibition of his latest work at the Shangri-La Hotel this week. Concerned that the art was dying out, Norbu took it on himself to teach and educate a new generation of painters. There are not many economic opportunities available to people from his region, and this not only provides them with work, but also ensures that the culture survives. Not many people were interested in learning painting back then, but he did manage to recruit several youths. "They were more interested in 'modern' things like computers and motorbikes," he says. "Now that they have seen you can actually make good money from painting, many more are taking up brushes." The exhibition in Kathmandu this week includes a series that continue the story from Eric Valli's Himalaya, in which Norbu's paintings had featured. Part of the proceeds from the exhibition sales will go to the Kula Primary School in Dolpa. ● (Milan Wagle)

Dolpo Lives paintings by Tenzin Norbu, daily 10AM-4PM till 20 March at Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat



## BIGBEN



Back at Sundarijal >56

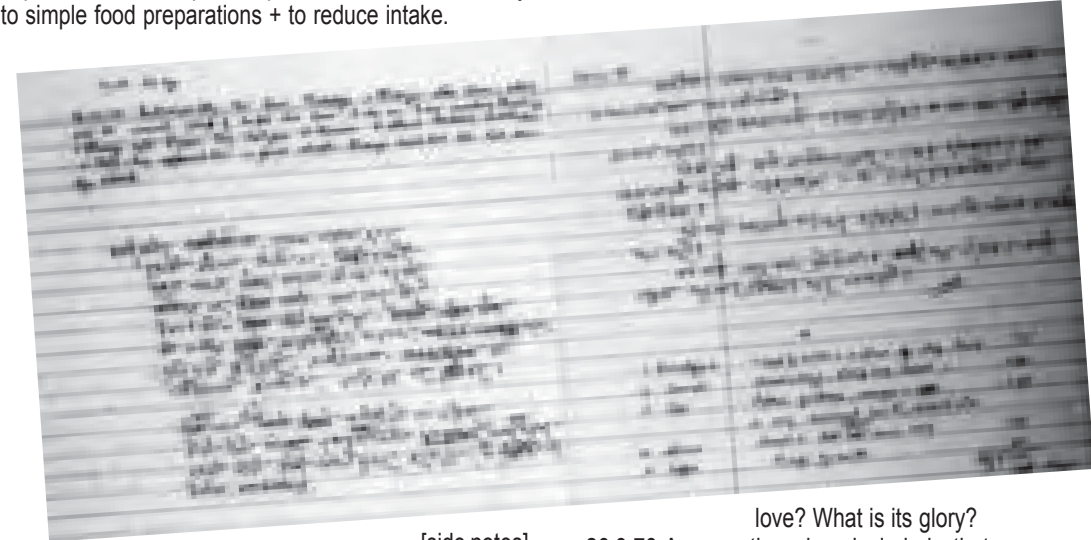
# "Love is a triumphant ride in a chariot"

These are the last few pages from BP Koirala's diary from his second time in jail and his release spanning a period from December 1977 till April 1979. The entries are few and far between, it is clear BP is suffering deep depression. His words range from the mundane (price of his prison diet) to an analysis of why King Birendra missed an opportunity by not releasing him. BP was finally released in March 1978. A dramatic period of Nepali history was soon to unfold with the student-led agitation and the 1980 Referendum in which the multiparty democracy camp lost 55:45 percent. BP Koirala died two years later in Kathmandu on at the age of 68. This the end of transcripts from BP's diary that has been carried in this space.

My weight is 62 kg  
16.12.77 Interview day. This time Thulodaju + Bhauju also came along with the usual group of people who come to see me. I am meeting Thulodaju and Bhauju after 8 years. They had gone to Benares to attend Prakash's marriage in 1969. They appeared to be in good shape. Bhauju said that she had some eye trouble.

[Nepali poetry, see insert from diary]		
1. Breakfast a cup of milk + a piece of dry bread	.75	
2. Lunch Bread (dry) veg. Salad	1.50	
3. Tea A piece of cheese, orange or apple	1.80	
Or any seasonal fruit + biscuits or tea		
4. Dinner Bread + dal added with some veg.	.75	
5. Supper a cup of milk	.50	
	Rs 5.00	
Meat once a week	3 /-	Rs 5.45

I want to stick to this dietary discipline. I must begin by curtailing the expenses on food in my pursuit of simple way of life. Here the problem is that I can't experiment with simple inexpensive food. GM can't adjust to simple food preparations + to reduce intake.



[side notes]  
John Fowles: novels 1. magus 2. French Lt's Woman 3. Daniel Martin  
John Cheever: Falconer "The loneliness of prisoner and memories and the need of basic companionship in the theme of this deeply emotional novel" -Time  
Philip Roth: the Professor of Desire "wrestling with sex and guilt" -Time

13.1.78  
A large no. of relations came to see me the day being interview day. Sushila was also there sparkling like the diamond tops that she was wearing. She had put on a Nepali cholo, a concession to the Kathmandu winter. Shailaja, Mainya (Naresh's mother), had given her two ... on the day she visited here when Mainya was also there. I am happy to see her after a long time. I patted her when she was leaving and she gave me a look both of frankness and surprise at my behaviour. I am noticing it today that she has a pair of ... eyes bright and expressive. They alone, it appears, seem to have retained her ... glory. Sushila became authoritative with me and she gave me a lot of advice. How I should live in prison, wouldn't permit me to wear the new spectacles which I had got from here, because, according to her, the frame didn't suit me. ... about my watch too she was particular about its shape and size. I like this tender bossing because I know she loves me dearly. I have not been able to give her the affection she has always yearned for from me—single minded love. This affectionate bossing—trying to rule over my conduct—is an indication of her self-confidence and also her confidence in me, in spite of everything. I am happy to see the confidence that in her. I have been telling her during acute crises in our relationship that the 1<sup>st</sup> basis of a worthwhile human existence is human dignity and that dignity being the primary basis of human

existence...  
While she was entering my section of the enclosure via GM's she abruptly turned around to accost GM who had called her from his side, and sprained her leg. She was limping. I touched and lightly massaged her swollen feet—which had become blue and swollen ... afterwards when she had gone and I was left reflecting and alone I felt that in the eye of others my unpremeditated action would appear demonstrative. I am perhaps demonstrative in love—demonstrative not posturing. Love is perhaps a victory, it is a triumphant ride in a chariot. It is a service—no one has yet called its glory a demonstrative posture.  
19.1.78 the Supreme Court has rejected Shailaja's habeus corpus petition on my behalf. I had expected a positive verdict. My expectation was based on the assumption that the best way for the king to get out of the embarrassing situation would be to make use of the Supreme Court to effect my release on health grounds without however lifting the cases against me. GM, too, in this assumption should be released on bail, for which he had applied to in the Supreme Court. We would be out of prison and left to fight the legal battle as best as we can and the political pressure would thus be reduced on the king. The situation outside isn't such as to enable us to mount any effective political offensive and the legal battle would be tiringly long process which would in course of time take away the initial popular interest in us. We have no political program at present, and in present situation we can't even attempt to create public opinion. I think the king has missed his opportunity. I am full of Shailaja today.  
2.2.78 Why do you have to tell me in every message that you send me that I must be free from all "anxieties" that I must trust you  
24.9.78 ... What is

love? What is its glory?  
26.9.78 Any emotion—love included—that expresses itself through the medium of ... loses its primary energy and purity in the process. Like a river passing through a vast desert,. Say "yes" to life. Be positive. Madalasa was with me for a few minutes. In my present mental state those words from her came as a great solace—truth or no truth.  
1.10.78 Sushila + Chetana came. I couldn't go to receive them at the airport because of my knees.  
13.10.78 Shailaja came from Varanasi. Brought some fruits for me.  
14. Distressed  
15. Distressed  
16.  
17. Extremely distressed and distraught  
30.3.79  
I was prevented from landing at the Biratnagar airport. A group of hired people led by Dilbahadur (same Diba) infested the landing ground with the connivance of the govt. Repetition of the scene at the Pokhara airport and a few months ago where under similar situation the plane carrying me was not permitted to land.  
1.4.79 I was served with a notice, to confine my movement to the Kathmandu Valley  
27.4.79 At midnight precisely at 11:20 pm I was put under house arrest. The notice was served by a DSP and the order was from acting CDO. And immediately afterwards armed guards were posted around the house under an inspector. Kisunji and GM were also arrested and send to their places of detention—Nakhu + Police Training Centre. The telephone was also cut off, but not before I could inform some of our friends about my detention.





Back to understanding more golf terminology

# Golf talk

A few weeks ago we were looking at getting started, basics components, golf terms, and other fundamentals. I was amazed and gratified that a lot of non-golfers have been reading Tee Break. I will take this opportunity to give my sincere thanks to those who liked the column, and even more appreciation to those who gave constructive comments for its improvement. It's great to know that so many non-golfers are interested in knowing more about the sport. Some have let me know that they were quite disappointed that the column moved away from explaining the basics of golf. Well, I am here for the readers and for golf, so off we go on more aspects of the game. When talking golf, here are more terms we use to describe the swing and type of shots played.

TEE BREAK  
Deepak Acharya



Addressing the ball – When a person is ready to hit the golf ball, they address the ball when they take their grip on the club, stand before the ball and place the club behind the ball in preparation for a backswing.

Backswing – This is the first part of the swing. It involves the backward movement of the club away from the ball and around over the shoulder, in preparation for the downswing. A good backswing paves the way for a good downswing and follow through. Ideally, at the top of the backswing the shoulders are turned until the shaft of the club is parallel to the ground and target line, and the golfer's weight is more on the back foot.

Downswing and follow through – The movement of the club between the top of the backswing to the point of hitting the ball is called the downswing. A good down swing usually brings the club face back to an almost identical position as the club face was at in the address position (before starting the backswing). The follow-through is an acceleration of the swing after the club face hits the ball and also involves the body turning towards the target to add more power the swing.

Full shot – On a full shot, an ideal backswing, downswing and full follow-through is taken, where after the shot the body has turned towards the target and the weight is almost all on the forward foot. Most beginners and club golfers are seen taking more than a full backswing, where the club passes the parallel point at the top of the swing, and then taking only a short follow-through. This leads to weak and inconsistent shots.

Chipping and Pitching – These are shorter length shots around the green. A chip shot usually aims at hitting the ball a shorter distance (5 to 30 yards) than a pitch shot (30 to 70 yards). On a chip shot the ball travels less distance in the air and runs more on the ground. On a pitch shot, the ball would be hit higher into the air and travels a shorter distance on the ground.

Putting – The shot played on the green is called putting. A special club called a putter is used, which is quite different from all other clubs. The putter is used to roll the ball along the ground towards the hole. Putting the ball is one of the most high pressure aspects of playing golf, and cases of putters being broken in anger during a round, or thrown in disgust into a lake after missing a crucial putt, are not uncommon.

Bunker Shot – This is a shot played from a hazard filled with sand. The usual club used and the method of hitting the ball is different from normal golf shots. Beginners almost always find hitting a bunker shot a nightmare.

Need to know more before next week? Hop down to your nearest golf practice facility and take a lesson from a professional. Meanwhile please keep giving me feedback, and hopefully I shall be able to meet your expectations better.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Head Golf Professional at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu [prodeepak@hotmail.com](mailto:prodeepak@hotmail.com)

# Peddalling peace

## Eleven Sri Lankans are bicycling across the region to promote non-violence

ARUNI JOHN

These days everyone seems to be making some sort of statement for peace, but it is a message that can never heard too often.

The 11 members of the Sri Lankan Global Peace Secretariat cyclist team are on a two-year bicycling tour to spread the word of non-violence. The eight men and three women arrived in Nepal last week, and are a mix of Sinhalese and Tamils, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Aged 27-43, they are a microcosm of Sri Lankan society. Despite their shoe-string budget of about Rs 1,000 a day for the whole team, they hope to cover all the SAARC countries and, if possible, even Afghanistan.

It hasn't been as simple as just hopping on a bicycle and pedalling away. Yogarajah, a mechanical engineer by profession, had a secure position in the family business but decided that he had to do something worthwhile before it was too late. Forming an enthusiastic foursome with friends Upali, Rizwan and Upul, he managed to raise a little money and place advertisements in the national papers to search for more partners.

The 45 applicants were put through gruelling physical tests, as well as a psychological assessment to see if they could withstand the rigours of a low-budget and unpredictable biking tour. After narrowing the final team down to 11 members, their next hurdle was to find bicycles. After several tries, Hero cycles finally agreed to give each member a Razorback, their latest model. Finally, in January they were ready to hit the road.

They cover about 80km a day and ride in two sub-teams, keeping in touch through walkie-talkies so that no one gets lost. They carry their tents and food with them, averaging about 40kg for the men and 20kg for the women. They prefer to stay in schools or youth hostels, but on occasion they have camped out for the night in the three tents.

The team is struck by the similarities they find among south Asians and feel confident that their mission will be understood. They have printed bright yellow 'peace flyers' which they hand out as they cycle. They talk of being taken aback by the warm hospitality they have received everywhere, despite the language barrier. Rizwan is the only team member who can speak Hindi. The rest of the team is appreciative of his language skills as, with the exception of being able to use Tamil in south India, they could not make themselves understood in Sinhala anywhere, and on the B-roads they were on, not many Indians spoke English.

Rizwan is also the team's chef, not an easy task: Hindus don't eat beef and Muslims don't eat pork, so the staple has been chicken, or mutton when they can get it, with rice and dal. "The most difficult place to find anything to eat was Bihar," said Rizwan. "Everything was so unclean that we were really worried we'd get sick, so we ate only biscuits for a few days," he adds. A strict Muslim himself, Rizwan tries to get halal meat where he can, and prays five times a day.

Despite the geographic convenience that a route through Bangladesh would have offered,

they decided to tackle Nepal first since it is Buddha's birthplace. So far, they say it's been great. A dangerous brush with a jeep in India left member Sarada with a wounded leg. By comparison, cycling in Nepal has been a breeze, despite the punishing climb up to the Kathmandu Valley.

Shyam Kakshapati of Nanglo Bakery Cafe saw them cycling past his Kurintar resort on their way up to Kathmandu and immediately invited them to stop and have breakfast on the house. Dr Arun Kumar Singh helped Champa Nilmini with a wheeze brought on by the Valley dust, and Sri Lankan Ambassador Grace Asirwatham hosted a dinner in their honour. The Sri Lankan community, including its resident celebrity, under-19 cricket coach Roy Dias, turned out in full force to show their support. Kathmandu's Sri Lankan community took up a hat collection to help the team through the next stage of their long journey.

What next, once this is all over? Will the team be able to get used to being in one place, or will they miss the wheels going round and round? "When our mission is complete, when we've been to all the SAARC countries, and maybe further, and then come home, we'll go all around our own island to show them what we've done," says Yogarajah.

Adds Upali, "Then they'll see if we can do so much, why can't they do something too and work together for peace. At least our children's generation will live in a better world." ●

To track the progress of the team, log on to <http://www.angelfire.com/trek/global/peace>



MIN BAJRACHARYA



"Lata le destina genda tander!" (In a land of fools, a man with a goose is a hero.)



To see all the Adventures of Bheeraj, visit him in Nepal, go to [www.bheeraj.com.np](http://www.bheeraj.com.np) for more information. Bheeraj is a cartoon character created by Bheeraj.

## ABOUT TOWN

## FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **The Legendary St Patrick's Day Party** at Kilroy's 13 March, 12PM on the Sunny Terrace until late 4250440, 4250441
- ❖ **French language week** 15-20 March, Alliance Française 4241163
- ❖ **Dolpo Lives** Paintings by Tenzin Norbu, Shangri-la Hotel
- ❖ **Paintings by Asha Dangol**, 5:30 PM 18 March at Gallery Moksh
- ❖ **Numafung paintings** 16-30 March, Gallery Nine 4428694

## EVENTS

- ❖ **Memorial service** for Father Eugene L Watrin, 14 March, 4PM at the GAA Hall, Thamel. 4444785, 4443236, [gaa@gaa.org.np](mailto:gaa@gaa.org.np)
- ❖ **ASMAN's AGM and election** 13 March, Hotel Shankar, 2-4PM
- ❖ **ELD Intensive Workshop** on Developing Project Proposals & Reporting Skills, 15-19 March. 4256618, [eld@wlink.com.np](mailto:eld@wlink.com.np)
- ❖ **the boss Creative Hunt** Painting competition for school children, ages 5-18 on 14 March at St Xaviers School.
- ❖ **Fair & Lovely Woman Beyond Tomorrow Carnival** 14 March 10:30 AM- 5PM at the Hyatt Regency. Entrance Rs 50.
- ❖ **Charity Football Match** Government secretaries vs diplomats 2PM 13 March, Dasrath Stadium, Sahara Group, 437885
- ❖ **4th Great Himalayan VW Beetle Rally** 13 March, Beetles assemble at 8:30 AM at Patan Durbar Square. [info@beetlerally.net](mailto:info@beetlerally.net)
- ❖ **Aarohan Theatre Group** presents Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls House* at Sama Natak Ghar, Baneshwor, weekends till 14 March. 4466956

## MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazzmandu**
  - **Jazzmandu Workshop** 12 and 14 March 4:30 PM onwards. Invitations available from Elites School or Upstairs Jazz Bar.
  - **Valley Jam** 12 March 7:30-10PM at the Shangri-La Jazz Bar
  - **Jazz Bazaar** 13 March 4PM onwards at Gokarna forest, Rs 599
  - **Jazzmandu Peace Parade** 14 March, 1-2PM in Lazimpat
  - **Sounds of Africa**, Max Lolo, 17 March 7PM Yak&Yeti, 4248999
- ❖ **The Trio Givone** Gypsy Jazz band from France, every night from 7PM at the Piano Lounge & Bar, Hotel Yak and Yeti, 4248999
- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** with Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band every Friday and Saturday, Shangri-la H, 4412999
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** Dwarika's every Friday 7PM, 4479488

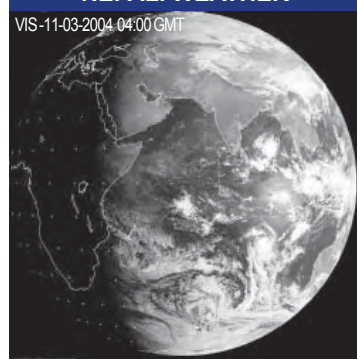
## FOOD

- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** BBQ lunch with live music at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Rs 650 per person. 4273999
- ❖ **Bring your wine** along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.

## GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Escape to Godavari** on a special halfboard package for Nepalis and expatriates at the Godavari Village Resort, 5560675
- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage** Dadagaon luxury package of gourmet meals,
- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa 4451212
- ❖ **Weekend Special** for Rs 3,000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280

## NEPALI WEATHER



by MAUSAM BEED

The most significant feature of this week's weather is the presence of a massive cloud front stretching up from the Bay right up to Tibet. It has covered a bit of eastern Nepal and brought drizzles. We have been surprised by this sudden development and have been tracking it as it stays almost stationary in the tug-o-war between the westerly jetstream and the low pressure circulation that is pushing it northwest. This system could spread out into parts of central and western Nepal through the weekend, bringing light rain with possible thunderstorms. Calm and cloudy days with isolated short showers are in store till early next week.

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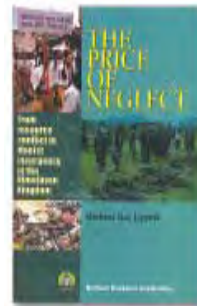
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## BOOKWORM

**The Price of Neglect** Bishnu Raj Upreti  
Bhrikuti Academic Publications, 2004  
Rs 1,295

Bishnu Raj Upreti has provided an intelligent insight into the causes of social and resource conflicts and the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. The book is broken down into a general understanding of conflict analysis, an analysis of relationships between resource governance, scarcity and conflict and finally, an examination of the Maoist insurgency and efforts for the peace process. It ends on a positive note, with a proposed road map for the peace process and conflict transformation. A must-read for those concerned about our country's current crisis.



Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, [mandala@ccsl.com.np](mailto:mandala@ccsl.com.np)

Oscar winner Russell Crowe stars as Captain "Lucky" Jack Aubrey, renowned captain in the British navy in this fast-paced, action packed epic directed by three-time Academy Award directing nominee Peter Weir. *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* is based on Patrick O'Brian's series of Aubrey/Maturin novels, and is set during the Napoleonic Wars. In the course of the characters' epic journey, the movie travels the world—from the coast of Brazil to the storm-tossed waters of Cape Horn, south through ice and snow, to the far side of the world, to the remote shores of the Galapagos Islands.

## JAI NEPAL CINEMA



From 13 March Call 4442220 for show timings. [www.jainepal.com](http://www.jainepal.com)

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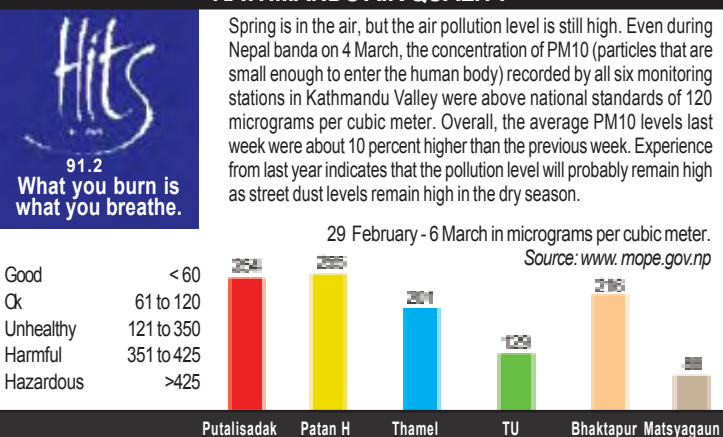
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## HAPPENINGS



IN SESSION: Bal Bahadur Rai and Ramchandra Poudel are just ears at a sunny mock parliament session at Bhrikuti Mandap on Thursday.



NEW VISION: 3,000 people turned up at Lekpharsha VDC in Surkhet on Saturday for an eye camp organised by Nepal Red Cross Society.



ROOF RIDERS: After the government ordered buses on the roads on Monday's Maoist banda, passengers crowded on the available public transport.



TARAI HOLI DAY: Youths celebrate a colourful Tarai Holi outside the Janaki Mandir in Janakpur on Sunday.



NOT ACTING: Nepali movie stars at a CIAA interaction about corruption in the film industry.

## NEPALI SOCIETY

# Positive about life

When her husband set off to work at the office of an Indian tea company in Mumbai, Mathura Devi Kunwar thought he would come back with savings. He came back infected with HIV.

Plenty of Achham's men migrated to India for seasonal work and returned home healthy, so there was no reason for Mathura Devi to suspect anything. In fact, she hadn't even heard much about AIDS.

Once she found out she was HIV positive, she joined the Social Volunteers Against AIDS (SoVAA) in Achham and today she is one of the most dedicated activists helping raise awareness about the disease in her community.

When Mathura Devi's husband died five years ago, she was determined not to let the disease destroy her life and those of her neighbours' whose husbands also worked in India. "I realised this is my social service. HIV/AIDS is an evil disease. There is no cure. My village would be destroyed by it. If I have it today, others will have it tomorrow. So I became a volunteer," she told us.

Achham villagers began to note that many of the men who went to Mumbai for work came home only to die. When they found out it was AIDS, the sick men and their families were stigmatised. Save the Children-UK started the volunteer

campaign in Achham because it is a district with one of the highest infection rates in the country.

Today, the volunteers do all the planning and implementation of AIDS awareness activities themselves. They battle social stigma and ostracisation, providing care and support to families with infected members.

These days, Mathura Devi is busy taking care of other community members, and also has to raise her four children. The children faced discrimination from other village kids and they were taunted because their father died of AIDS. But not any more.

"Previously, infected people

were teased, and treated with disgust. Some even said that if they were creamed, the smoke would infect others so they were wrapped in plastic and buried," recalls Mathura Devi.

Mathura Devi is very clear about what her community still needs: awareness, medicine, counseling, access to blood tests, and the orphans need a shelter. Her children dread the day when they will lose their mother too. But Mathura Devi consoles them: "My work is my medicine. I still feel like I won't die. I am very happy. But even if I die, my community will survive, and so will my children." ● (Sraddha Basnyat)



## World Food Programme

### CALL FOR A CONSULTANT

World Food Programme, Country Office (CO), Nepal invites applications from qualified and experienced Nepali Consultant in order to review the status of collaboration between the Rural Access Programme (RAP) and Rural Community Infrastructure Works (RCIW).

This consultancy is expected to require 2-3 weeks. The incumbent shall perform the following duties;

- Assess the effectiveness of the targeting mechanisms/criterion utilized by RAP with regard to the food security objectives of the RCIW Programme.
- Analyse the cost effectiveness of using rice as an input vis a vis cash.
- Analyse the appropriateness of using food aid as a partial input in the target areas of RCIW/RAP
- Review the social mobilization system along with the local communities empowerment strategy set up in the clusters assisted by RAP, especially with regard to micro projects and the promotion of food security projects at the community level.
- Assess the impact of the core projects vis a vis the micro-projects in term of socio-economic impact as well as their complementarities.
- Review the existing monitoring system and methodology to measure the impact of the Programme including the promotion of household level food security.
- Review the maintenance arrangements put in place as well as the sustainability of the micro-projects implemented. Analyse the current practice of supporting maintenance through Food for Work.
- Review the effectiveness of implementation arrangements as per agreed documents.

#### Qualifications and Experience:

The consultant must have 10 years of working experience in Community Infrastructure Development, and Food Security area and at least 5 years of proven impact evaluation experience in the any of the above field. Masters in Sociology, Rural Development, Socio economic development or related field. PhD preferred. Experience in RCIW/RAP will be an advantage. Extensive field works, which involves discussion with the stakeholders at the grass root level, at the districts and central level required. Well versed in English and Nepali. Having effective report writing skills.

Letter of applications, which should include the applicant's curriculum vitae should be sent to The Representative, WFP, P.O. Box 107, UN House, Pulchowk, Kathmandu and must reach the WFP, Country Office **NO Later than 1400 hrs, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2004 (Monday)**. Only short listed candidates will be invited for the interview.

**Women candidates are strongly encouraged to apply.**



# Really good news

Us hacks have been getting a lot of flak lately from loyal readers and royal leaders alike complaining that we print only the bad news, recommending that we take immediate action against the alleged culprits in an undisclosed location.

**UNDER MY HAT**  
Kunda Dixit



Here is a sample letter from an irate reader that will give you some idea of what we have to put up with

every day in our area of work in the Fourth Estate:

Dear Sir:

I don't know why I am addressing you as 'sir' when I know it for a fact that you have never been knighted by the queen. You could also not be a sir at all, but a madam, in which case, I beg your pardon. But let's presume for a moment for the sake of argument that you are indeed a male knight. Even then, I have strong reservations about addressing you with such an honorific title because I am writing to complain about your work, you lousy piece of \$%#&\*! How come all the news you print is negative? How come you have nothing nice to say about anybody? How come you give the impression that the sky is about to fall? Unless you start printing good news with immediate effect, I am personally going to see to it that you are awarded a medal and given a public felicitation.

Yours etc,

Name withheld to protect exact identity of anonymous writer

All right, you asked for it. We will now take this small commercial break to carry some items of really good news:

## No Need To Panic: Govt

The government has assured citizens that although all major cities are being blockaded, basic necessities have disappeared from shelves and long-distance buses are being blown up by roadside bombs, there is no need to panic, reports RSS.

"We have everything under control," the government spokesperson, who is also Minister of Health and Hygiene told mediapersons, "there is no reason for alarm right now, we will let you know when it is time to panic." The public seemed reassured by the good news and immediately started hoarding potatoes and sugar.

## 501-Member Committee Formed

POKHARA—A 501-member committee has been formed in Pokhara to organise a public felicitation ceremony next week. Exactly who is being felicitated is being kept a closely guarded secret and highly placed sources said on condition of anonymity that the identity was not being disclosed because it was supposed to be a surprise for the chief guest. "We don't want to spoil the fun, but there are no prizes for guessing who it is," the source said.

## Govt Finishes Its Homework

His Majesty's Government, which was accused by political parties of not doing its homework on time, has finished its homework. "We can proudly say we have now completed our homework," said the Minister of Home, Works and Transport, "it is the office work that is giving us problems."

## Political Parties Still At It

At a mock-parliament on Thursday, leaders of the five-party alliance expressed alarm that the Maoists were getting ahead in the race to bring the country to standstill, and decided to step up their own efforts to bring the country to a grinding halt. Party spokesman Madup Nepal said: "We know that country is already at a standstill. That makes our job a lot easier."

## Banda Rumours Confirmed

Rumours that Friday may be a banda has been greeted with much jubilation in non-governmental sectors through email group postings. Police sources confirmed the rumours, saying: "Yes, at this point we can confirm there are rumours about a banda." No one, not even the organisers, were aware that they had called a banda. But non-governmental organisations were undeterred, saying in a statement: "We will make the banda a success even if it hasn't actually been called."

