

NEPALI Times

#188

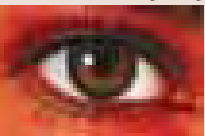
19 - 25 March 2004

24 pages

Rs 25

EYE CONTACT

A world-class eye care centre in Kathmandu is giving thousands of Nepalis the gift of sight, and Nepal has emerged as a major exporter of artificial intraocular eye lenses. If only there were more cornea donors. **p 12-13**


Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 128

Q. Does a banda help or harm the organiser?



Total votes: 1,002

Weekly Internet Poll # 129. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the political parties take part in elections if the government announces dates?

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KISHORE NEPAL in KAWASOTI

This township along the East-West Highway, west of the Narayani River, used to be a quiet, peaceful place. Farmers and traders came here to make phone calls and buy newspapers. They sat along the streets, drinking tea, talking politics. Nothing really exciting ever happened here.

Like a lot of other districts in Nepal, Nawalparasi has changed in the past three years. The local vocabulary is full of new words like “ambush” and “search operation”. But the most dreaded word is “*bepatta*”.

These days, the only people who come to Kawasoti are those looking for a missing son or husband.

Shanti is from Deurali village, and has been searching for her husband who was abducted by an armed group several days ago.

“This seems to be my fate, I have wept so much I have no tears left,” she says. Shanti’s husband is a teacher, he was neither a Maoist nor a government employee. He was sleeping when they came and dragged him out of the house at three in the morning.

Someone in a tea shop in her village told Shanti her husband may be in police custody in Kawasoti. That is why she has come here. At the police station, an officer asked her to wait. Two hours later, another policeman appeared and told her: “He is not here, he may be in Bharatpur or in Kathmandu.”

Laxmi and Bhagawati have similar stories of disappeared husbands. Getting no help from the police, they are desperate to tell their stories to a visiting reporter, but Laxmi and Bhagawati could not utter a single word. Tears welled up in their eyes, and they stared silently at the ground.

The horror is unending. A young man who called himself a Maoist who was trying to rape a neighbourhood girl recently, and Dewaki Tiwari tried to protect her. In retaliation, a group of Maoists killed Dewaki’s young son and destroyed her house.



SUBHAS RAI

Bepatta

Relatives of Nepal's disappeareds bear unending pain

In Kawasoti, Belaui Khanal has nothing left to feed her family. Groups of Maoists keep coming by and there is nothing left. “They threaten to kill my husband and children if we don’t feed them,” Belaui says. “The next day the soldiers come and harass and abuse us. Sometimes they are worse than the Maoists.”

Prem Bahadur Karki used to be vice-chairman of Deurali VDC near here, and says every household has

at least one disappeared member. “This is new kind of terror for us,” says Karki. “The families live in dread of armed gangs that roam the villages at night.”

The villagers can’t tell whether the armed men are soldiers or Maoists. “Their uniforms are similar,” says Ishwari Pande, ex-DDC chairman. So is the method: the midnight knock on the door, a sleeping husband or son dragged off into the darkness by armed men,

the desperate search, the lack of answers.

Next week in Geneva, at the UN Commission on Human Rights, the spotlight will be on Nepal in a debate expected to be initiated by the Swiss government. Both the Maoists and the government are sure to be censured for atrocities. ●

Editorial p2
Reversing gears





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REVERSING GEARS

It has finally dawned on the current rulers in Kathmandu that the only path to legitimacy is representation sanctioned by the people. It is never too late to learn that lesson.

The political party leadership smells a rat in the government's election talk. It is convinced the polls are a ploy by the king to buy time. That may be true, but can't be an excuse to dismiss elections outright.

When King Gyanendra sacked Sher Bahadur Deuba on 4 October 2002, he invoked the constitution saying that a prime minister who couldn't hold elections as planned did not deserve to stay in power. Now, the tables are turned. Can his royal government deliver on the polls it is about to announce? Or is it banking on things getting so much worse that it will never have to answer that question?

If the Maoist blockades are a sign of things to come, it will not be easy to hold elections. Even if multi-phased polls are held, the process is sure to be considerably unfree and unfair. As we have seen this week, all it takes is to set five buses on fire to bring the entire central part of the country to a grinding halt. The security forces can do little more than hover overhead in choppers.

There couldn't be a more difficult time to hold polls. The only questions are: how and what kind? There seems to be no other way out of the present trilateral deadlock. The Maoists could seize the opportunity to put up a political front, the king could get a face-saving way to invoke Article 127 once more and take himself back to a pre-October Fourth position, and the parties could go back to the people.

This country has been blundering on the wrong road for the past two-and-half years. We can get back on the peace highway by reversing gears and undoing the wrong turns of the past by:

- Setting up an acceptable election government made up of all parties
- Set dates for staggered local and national elections
- In that period, renegotiate a monitored ceasefire
- Conduct credible elections for new parliament
- Negotiate a sustainable peace
- Debate and implement constitutional changes

The alternative is to keep on this blood-soaked road till god knows when. Allowing people representation from the grassroots to national levels is the only way to restore peace, preserve our unity, strengthen the constitutional monarchy, and ensure economic progress.



10,000+

There can be no doubt that the Maoists have engaged in gross human rights violations such as summary execution, rape, torture and the killing of innocents. (Editorial, '10,000+', #187) There is good reason to believe that the RNA and police are doing so on an even larger scale. But this must be seen in historical perspective. For hundreds of years the high caste Hindus have abused, exploited, robbed and neglected the *janjatis* and *Dalits*. The horrific poverty, high mortality and immense burden of suffering imposed on these people by Nepal's self-righteous, callous and corrupt elite, who blame the Maoists for the current situation, reveals the very mindset that drove the Maoists to revolution in the first place. To place the Maoists' human rights violations, evil and despicable as they are, in perspective is to realise that the rural poor who constitute the Maoist cadres are a thousand

times more sinned against than sinning.

Sandip Mishra, Kathmandu

- On what basis can the Maoists call this a 'peoples war'? How will it help their revolution by punishing the poorest of the poor with their bandas and blockades? Tourism and businesses are now on the verge of extinction. And why are political parties playing games and not trying to find a solution? It is time for the leaders of all the political forces to rescue the country before it is too late.

Bishad Piya, Kirtipur

CHARITRAHEEN SOCIOLOGY

In their manifesto ('Women declare independence', #186), the Charitraheen Chelis (CC) seem to want their personal freedom but are using societal issues to give it an aura of objectivity and judicious concern toward society. Why?

1. The CC are most likely some well-to-do women from Kathmandu who can afford to go to discos and drink

Many little steps

The abortion bill was a giant leap, but many more small steps are needed to make motherhood safe

Persistent advocacy efforts by women's reproductive rights activists and strong research findings eventually convinced the government to reform Nepal's abortion laws two years ago.

The challenges in coming years

GUEST COLUMN
Aruna Upreti



will be a very different: disseminating information about the new law and about safe abortion to doctors, health workers, advocates, law enforcement officials and politicians. We have taken one giant leap toward saving thousands of women from unsafe abortion in Nepal each year, but many more little steps still need to be taken to begin improving the maternal mortality crisis in Nepal. (See: 'Double loading', #184)

As long as young Nepali mothers don't have access to adequate nutrition, basic health services, minimum supplies of cotton wool and IV fluids in far-flung health posts, bills passed in Kathmandu will have little impact. While the Ministry of Health takes its time to draw criteria for

abortions in hospitals, illegal abortions in hospitals, and unsafe and costly operations by private providers continue.

It was late in the afternoon at a rural health camp in western Nepal last year when a woman came in hesitantly. She looked uncomfortable and unsure. I was used to this, most women have never spoken about their intimate health problems with anyone. "I am pregnant," she told the nurse, who asked her if she wanted to make sure.

"No," said the woman, more loudly this time and meeting the health worker's eyes. "I want you to help me get rid of it."

The nurse explained that it was illegal. The woman turned to me and said: "But I heard that the government passed a law saying abortions could be done in hospitals."

"That is definitely not true," the health worker told her abruptly. The woman looked crestfallen. For a moment I was unsure who to deal with first, the patient or the health worker.

"I heard it on the radio," the



woman said. "Isn't it true?" I told her she was partly right. "Parliament has passed the bill, but it still needs the king's approval. It is a formality, but we can't legally perform abortions until then."

She was downcast as she left the clinic without another word. The sadness in her eyes haunted me and I hoped that she wouldn't seek some illegal and untrained quack to terminate her pregnancy and put her life in danger.

The nurse turned to me once we were alone: "We health workers don't know anything about making abortion legal. We knew there was a discussion going on in Kathmandu, but no one ever told us the law was passed."

Having worked for more than a decade as a reproductive rights activist, researching, writing and lobbying the government to have abortion legalised, I believed we had made an enormous impact when parliament passed the bill. But if my co-worker in this clinic in western Nepal hasn't even heard of the bill, what was the value of our work? At the rate we are going it will take another 50 years for the bill to make an impact on our maternal death rate. What had seemed an enormous step suddenly seemed frighteningly small. Little did I realise when I told the woman that we still had a long way to go, how long we really had to travel. ●

LETTERS

and dine out regularly. They obviously do not have economic constraints, and therefore don't represent the majority of Nepali people, let alone Nepali women. Their only worry seems to be a culture that raises a finger to them for their 'unwomanly behavior'. But is this really true? Is our culture really stopping them from partaking from these 'fair shares of life's bounties' and thereby hindering them from being equal to the males?

2. Smoking and drinking is not necessarily a male vs female issue. In elite society and ironically also in the lowest rung of our society, women smoke freely. Except in some ethnic classes, women often drink with men in their homes.

3. Sexuality is an immensely personal and intimate topic and it can be handled only with the profound understanding between husband and wife. CC have commodified sexuality by demanding it to be available anywhere, anytime, and from anybody. They have not even felt the necessity of marriage as an institution.

4. The points regarding economic justice and equal opportunity are commendable. But these societal issues need massive economic reforms. Education and free markets are some key tools. When women are educated, they can be independent and strong both economically and physically. Free markets will bring the competition between everybody and not necessarily just friction between males and females. In some jobs females will surpass men, in other jobs men will do better. The invisible hand of the economy will decide which job is good for whom. The CC are only using serious societal issues as a free ride to serve myopic, self-centered, and self-defeating interests.

5. On a philosophical note, the manifesto is a reaction to the maladies of our very complex society. To portray these issues in stark male vs female terms and initiate a campaign based on vengeance and nihilism is to do great injustice to our very tolerant and flexible culture and society. I only hope one of the wishes of the CC will come true: that they always remain underground.

Gokul Bhandari, email

● Congratulations to the Charitraheen Cheli for their declaration of independence, Rosy Chhetri's piece was one of the most interesting, honest and pragmatic write ups I have read in your paper. Thanks to *Nepali Times* for boldly publishing such a write up. Unlike other declarations made by politically-motivated feminist groups focusing on petty issues that really did nothing good for women except serve the vested interest of the feminist group themselves.

Rajeeb L Satyal, Baluwatar

VANISHING VULTURES

Re: 'No more circling' by Samuel Thomas (#185). I am from the Saigha VDC in Dang and my house is near the border with Rolpa. I spent my childhood chasing vultures. These days the carcasses of animals have been replaced by corpses of guerrillas and soldiers, but there were no vultures any more. There were three nests of vultures in my VDC, on a tall pine tree were two pairs of smoky black *Pseudogyps bengalensis* which flocked to dead animals by river banks.

The palace’s cooks must accept the centrality of mainstream parties in any future election

Poll pot

The knock-on effect of the Maoist ‘blockade’ of the western region is now being felt in Kathmandu Valley. Kerosene and cooking gas have disappeared from the shops, shortages of essential items are spreading. Oblivious to the escalating anarchy, or maybe to distract attention, the government of royal nominees is now talking of elections. What exactly is brewing?

To conduct a free and fair election, there has to be a perceptible improvement

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



on four fronts: better

security, competent administration, competitive politics, and vibrant civil society. Both governments since October Fourth have failed to perform on all these counts.

Security is largely a matter of perception: the country is only as secure as you and I believe it to be. The people have so little confidence in the ability of the

government to protect its citizens that nobody dares defy something as irrational as a blockade of an entire region.

The people’s lack of faith in an administration dominated by the Joint Security Force is no less marked. Politics in the country has come to be defined by the ever-increasing mistrust between the monarch and the mainstream parties. A nascent civil society is in such disarray that it is unable to speak up.

Nobody in his right mind would want an election in these uncertain times. Political parties are united in settling scores with an activist monarch first. The Maoists will not settle for anything less than a constituent assembly. The administration isn’t in a position to hold even free, let alone fair, elections. A capital-centric civil society is in no particular hurry to handover the governance to politicians. It is only the international community—the Europeans in particular—who want the king to hold an election and get out of the post-October Fourth mess as respectably as possible.

King Gyanendra has his own reasons to

invoke polls. He had dismissed Sher Bahadur Deuba as an incompetent prime minister, ostensibly because the renegade kangresi had failed to conduct polls on the promised date. An election is a convenient tool that the ‘constructive’ monarch can use to appoint and dismiss premiers at will. But the strategists at Narayanhiti know this ruse won’t work forever. Ultimately, only an elected government can provide legitimate cover. Herein lies the dilemma for the king: he wants an election, but only one which will give him the desired result.

The tenure of the dissolved Pratinidhi Sabha ends this month. So if the myth of the constitution is to be kept alive, an announcement on polls needs to be made at the earliest. The five-phased Indian elections begin from 20 April, hence our own string-pullers must be hoping that the Maoists will be hard-pressed to reach an agreement with the Nepali government before that date to avoid the pre-poll squeeze of militant groups across the border. The Maoist blockade may actually be a harbinger

of an impending ceasefire. There are rumours that a list of ministers for the soon-to-be-formed cabinet has already been finalised by the palace. The man who acted as bridge between the Maoists and the military to make King Gyanendra’s mid-western visit a grand success could be Surya Bahadur Thapa’s successor at Baluwatar.

Dhanendra Bahadur Singh is an old court-faithful. He headed the civic reception committee that felicitated the king at Nepalganj. Earlier, he had chaired the Rajparishad Standing Committee before Parshu Narayan Chaudhary and Keshar Jung Raymajihi. He has been the Chief Justice, and all in all, he would be a harmless face to give continuity to the active monarchy. Whether he will actually conduct polls is almost moot.

The big question is what the mainstream political parties will do. Without them, talk of polls will just be talk. The Nepali acolytes of Brother Number One in the jungle, as well as the cooks at the poll pot in the palace, will do well to accept the centrality of mainstream parties in any future elections. ●



PADAM GHALE

Another pair of white vultures nested on a nearby cliff and were completely white. The nesting pairs used to hatch once once in two or three years but only a single chick eachtime. None of the nests are there anymore. Some of the other vultures were the Rajgiddha (*Sarcogyps cahins*). But they are also gone. The villagers blame insecticides, and the poison used to kill leopards for vultures vanishing. And it's not just the vultures, the chemicals are killing other birds as well. Samuel Thomas reports that the vultures in India and Pakistan are dying because of the veterinary anti-inflammatory drug, Declofenac,



that causes renal failure in vultures. This may be the other reason. The Kathmandu Declaration of Insecticides and Pesticides may show government commitment, but unless this translates to action to stop agro-chemicals and drugs, the birds are doomed. In the short tem vulture breeding programs need to be started immediately in Chitwan and Kosi Tappu.

Mati Pun, email

EDUCATING FOREIGNERS Manjushree Thapa’s comments (‘Educating foreigners’, #186) are right on. I have visited Nepal a number of times and daresay I know a bit more about Nepal’s history than most visitors, at the same time I know my actual knowledge of Nepal’s history is woefully lacking. She is right, too, that a country in the fierce process of defining itself presents a chaotic face to the world.

Hilary Dirlam, email

● Manjushree’s Guest Column was right on the button, at least it pushed one of mine. Now, she needs to write a counter-balancing article about tradi-

tional government antipathy to ‘long-stay’ foreigners in both the development and human service sectors. As I reflect on much of the ‘aid’ and ‘assistance’ that deluged the country in the early nineties, I wonder whether too much of it was ‘invested’ in the wrong places. What help was there for ‘the people’ to understand the true nature of the new constitution? In what way were the political parties encouraged to embrace the challenge to a new era of democratic internal organization, and discard globally discredited forms imported from ‘south of the border’? Perhaps most importantly, what assistance was there for the indigenous, internationally-informed ‘Fifth Estate’ to translate the opportunities and responsibilities of parliamentary democracy in ways educative to both people and parties? May the Nepali people and Nepali organizations long have rights to the insight of Nepal-aligned and locally-informed foreigners. Such persons may contribute best to locally-appropriate solutions by warning about ‘broken wheels’.

David Stevens, Alberta, Canada

HUMAN NATURE Daniel Lak in ‘Haiti’s warning for Nepal’ (#186) bemoans the actions of the US, Canada and France in Haiti. He accuses them of ‘gunboat diplomacy’ and forcing Aristide out of power. What riles him most is the claim of righteousness made by these western powers to justify what they are doing. But isn’t that totally expected? Does he not know that it is human nature to want to have the cake and eat it, too? During his time spent in Kathmandu he probably never came across a Nepali saying “*Ham pani, mam pani*”. If he had, he would have known that we in Nepal are no different than anyone else in wanting to have it both ways. Lak also says that what happened in Haiti should serve as a warning to Nepal. A warning for what? Should we be warned that the US and other powers who are currently backing Nepal in this fight against terrorism will withdraw their support and leave us high and dry once their interests have been served? The past is full of examples of the US first helping and later dumping people like General Pinochet of

Chile, Noriega of Panama, Marcos of the Philippines and, lately, Saddam Hussein (who?) of Iraq.

Arjun, email

HOSPITAL HAZARD I agree with Pragya Shrestha in ‘Medical menace in our backyards’ (# 187). In addition to the pollution caused by population growth, deranged urbanisation, and busy traffic, mismanagement of hospital waste actually has made it worse. Hospitals should not turn into health hazards.

Dr Eli Pradhan, Kathmandu

‘PATRANOMIE’ Could Mr Lak explain to the French readers of the *Nepali Times* what is “la patranomie”, this word or any approaching one being unknown.

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine CNRS, France

Daniel Lak replies: That was a glaring error on my part. I referred to France seeing Haiti as part of La Patronomie, but meant ‘La Francophonie’ and apologise to French friends and enemies alike.

Which is **real**, and which is **fake**?

Ever wondered why the medicine you take for that cough never seems to work?



DEWAN RAI

Two of the world’s leading producers of counterfeit pharmaceuticals are Nepal’s neighbours to the north and south. Fake and substandard medicines are widely sold in the Nepali market, but regulators, traders and the public don’t seem to realise the enormity of the problem.

Last month, the Department of Drug Administration (DDA) seized 1,200 capsules of the antibiotic amoxycillin 250mg from three pharmacies in Rupendehi district. The manufacturer was listed as Adip Labs of Kalol in India, but inquiries revealed that no such company exists. The capsules only contained a white odourless powder that was not an active ingredient.

What makes the seizure in Rupendehi interesting is that amoxycillin is one of the most-commonly prescribed antibiotics to counter infections and Rs 260 million worth of amoxycillin is sold in Nepal alone every year. What was caught is clearly the tip of the iceberg.

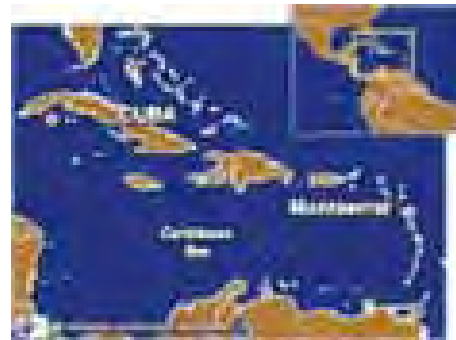
Seventy percent of Nepal’s annual Rs 8 billion pharmaceutical demands are met by Indian imports. Domestic production accounts for 27 percent and the rest come from other countries. The

A volcano in the Caribbean

Montserrat is a not a social volcano, it’s a real one

The British are up to something interesting in the Caribbean island of Montserrat, 700km south of me here in Miami, capital of the weird world. It pays to keep an eye on the Brits. They didn’t conquer half the world in the 18th and 19th centuries by luck alone. First though, a little background.

Poor Montserrat was once one of the happiest places in the world, a tropical paradise. A mere flyspeck at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, it escaped the wave of decolonisation that surged in the 1960s as European countries (with the exception, as ever, of France) shed their imperial possessions. Montserrat was too small to be independent on its own, too proud to be part of some nearby island’s



confederacy. So it chose to remain British. Britain didn’t really want this, but being a democracy, it went along with the wishes of the Montserratians and let them stay as one of London’s last colonies. It was good for tourism, good for the locals who wanted to go to the UK from time to time and a few pounds sterling flowed in as aid. The UK connection also kept American culture at bay. Montserrat remained stubbornly British, despite its pretensions to being Irish. The national symbol is a shamrock and all of the names of the inhabitants are O’ this, or Mc’ that.

Slavery was a distant memory. The British governor and London ruled with a light touch, letting a vibrant local democracy take root.

But something was brewing deep under the earth that was to be the snake in this paradise. For Montserrat, you see, was the tip of a vast undersea volcano.

One day in 1995, a subterranean explosion surged up to the surface in a hill called Chance’s Peak. Until that day, the hill had been a tourist attraction with steamy vents and hot water geysers showing that it was actually an active volcano.

But in 1995 and in subsequent years, lava and volcanic ash rained down on more half of the island, destroyed the quaint

wooden buildings of the capital and drove half the population into exile. It also wrecked what tourist industry there was and proved somewhat of an embarrassment to Tony Blair’s newly elected Labour



government in Britain.

If you see Claire Short in Nepal anytime soon, ask her if she has any “golden elephants” in her carry on baggage. She endeared herself, as DfID minister, to the Monserratians, by asking rhetorically if she was supposed to send them “golden elephants” when they were asking for more aid.

Anyway, paradise was lost. But now, DfID has cut off funds to Montserrat to pay for repairing damage caused by British and American military action in Iraq. And the latest wheeze to get the Montserratian economy moving again: nothing less than a ‘School for Natural Disaster Management’. Jobs, foreign currency, fame, all coming Montserrat’s way courtesy of Britain and Chances’ Peak.

Now here’s some thinking we could apply elsewhere. India could teach the world how to take over jobs from developed countries. South Africa how to heal racial divisions relatively painlessly. Pakistan, I’m positive, has much to teach us about how to handle America. Nobody does it better. And Nepal? What sort of school could Nepal run? Let’s get some readers’ suggestions on this with the best (and worst) printed in a future column. Nepal’s School of You read it here first. ●



 **Fake medicines are concoctions with wrong ingredients or incorrect quantities of active ingredients or products without any active ingredients at all**

 **It is virtually impossible to differentiate between real and counterfeit medicines without proper testing**

 **Nearly 10 percent of the global pharmaceutical commerce is attributed to fake drugs. In India it is at 20 percent and in Nepal it is probably more**

 **Combating this menace should be a shared responsibility**

World Health Organisation estimates that 35 percent of the fake drugs produced in the world come from India, where about 20 percent of all drugs sold are either fake or substandard.

The US Food and Drug Administration estimates that about 10 percent of all drugs around the world are counterfeit and 60 percent of them are found in developing countries. Indian fake medicines have made their way into the African market, including in Kenya and Nigeria (see box).

What worries consumer groups here is that the manufacture and sale of fake drugs is so prevalent in India, with which Nepal shares an open border. They say our monitoring and regulation systems aren't vigilant enough to meet this danger.

Doctors interviewed for this article say the lack of monitoring is compounded by lax enforcement of prescription rules. Antibiotics are readily available across the counter in Nepal. Fake, substandard and deficient dosages are creating a danger of drug resistance. The impact of this on tuberculosis and Acute Respiratory Infections could have a catastrophic impact in the future, when antibiotics prove ineffective for drug-resistant patients. TB treatment in Nepal is already hobbled by multi-drug resistant strains of the TB bacillus.

But the government plays down the extent of the problem. Bhupendra Bahadur Thapa, acting director general at the DDA says: "The counterfeit drug problem in Nepal is minimal. We have found only 3-4 cases of fake medicines in the past 15 years." The reason is that only licensed importers are officially allowed to bring in drugs from India before they are sold to retailers. However, he admits there is a problem in the tarai because of

smuggling.

According to Indian media reports, fake drugs are mainly manufactured in Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. Two of these Indian states border Nepal. The counterfeiters copy blister pack designs and even provide fake holograms on the packages. Fictitious batch numbers and dates of import can be made by fly-by-night outfits in Mumbai on letterheads of well-known pharmaceutical firms for exports. Consumer groups and doctors in Nepal say the only reason the DDA has found so few cases of counterfeit drugs in Nepal is because of poor and irregular monitoring. The only way to tell a if medicine is fake or substandard is to do a lab test. Since the problem is so vast, not all consignments can be spot-checked. Unscrupulous druggists can therefore easily buy fake drugs from smugglers at a lower prices and then sell them at the full price and triple their profit margins.

The government's current regulation only allows companies certified by WHO's Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) to bring medicines into Nepal. The DDA provides licenses to these companies after auditing them and also sends out inspection teams, as it did last month to Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore.

There are currently 272 Indian and 38 domestic companies registered with the government, selling about 8,000 brands of medicine. Only two Chinese manufacturers are registered with the DDA, and the threat of fake Chinese medicines is said to be less because most doctors prescribe Indian brands

and the Chinese ones are less in demand.

While counterfeits of well-known brands contain no ingredients of the original product, substandard drugs are either diluted or don't meet the standards prescribed in a country's pharmacopoeia. Adulteration, leaking and medicines past expiry dates or with the wrong proportion of ingredients are some of the reasons why drugs are substandard.

In last month's raids on pharmacies, the DDA found druggists in Narayanghat, Butwal and Krishnaagar with 11 brands of unlicensed medicines and collected 18 dubious samples of substandard drugs. Thapa says that of the total number of samples collected, only three percent were found to be substandard after tests at the Royal Drugs Laboratory. The DDA's main complaint is lack of manpower: it has only eight inspectors and has to make 400 laboratory tests per year.

One of the inspectors, Baburam Humagain, estimates that up to 20 percent of the drugs in the market are substandard. In a batch of spot tests last year, 96 out of 359 samples of medicines (expired Thiabrib, Antozol, Omiprazol capsules and Norifloxacin) were found to be substandard.

Ashok Sharma of the Nepal Pharmaceutical Producers Association says the DDA is doing a good job despite constraints, but admits that chemists and the public should also be vigilant. "Once they are tipped off, the DDA can take action against the culprits," he says.

The DDA seems to have realised that the main conduit for fake drugs is India, and in an effort to control smuggling has limited the transit for imported drugs to only nine points, including Kathmandu airport, Tatopani and points along the tarai. ●

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Lynched

Saptari villagers and the Maoists seem to have a common enemy: dacoits who roam the district. A fortnight ago, seven notorious robbers were caught looting a household in Belhi village. They were taken to a 'peoples court' where they were passed the sentence: death by lynching. The order was carried out in public and their bodies dumped on the road, where they lay rotting for three days (see *pics*). Two more robbers were captured and hanged on 3 March at Balan river, near the Nepal-India border.

Robberies have been on the rise, with around 100 households looted in the past month. The Maoists' severe measures came as a surprise, but villagers are still happy that such action will deter other looters. "Now the looting will stop," says a villager, who hopes that they won't have to deal with the constant robbery.

Even so, the looters are still finding it easy to raid the villages. In several places both security forces and Maoist militants are absent, leaving villagers defenseless against the heavy arms and weapons the dacoits carry. The Maoists have prohibited the villagers from keeping guns at home, and the police are of no help either. They do not make any inspections in the villages vulnerable to constant robbery. Most of the villages targeted by the robbers from across the border are in Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Janakpur, Sarlahi and Bara districts. (Manoj Shrestha in Rajbiraj)



Firewood is harmful to health

Most Nepalis use firewood cooking and heating. This leads to indoor smoke pollution, which causes Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI), especially in children. According to the Ministry of Health, ARI is one of the leading causes of infant mortality in the villages. It is estimated that about three percent of Nepalis are affected by ARI, out of which a quarter are children and infants. Experts say the government isn't paying enough attention to indoor pollution as it has for more 'glamorous' diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria, despite the fact that more people die and are suffering from ARI and the fact that ARI is curable. "This particular health issue has not grabbed the attention of the donor agencies," says a paper by Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), an organisation specialising in indoor pollution related activities. ITDG has been supporting poor rural communities to help reduce major health risks from kitchen smoke and creating mass awareness on the dangers of firewood used for cooking. Indoor air pollution is one the four leading causes of deaths in the world's poorest countries, where 2.4 billion people use biomass in their kitchen. It is estimated that the burning of solid fuels lead to the death of 1.6 million people, especially women and children, each year.

Nigeria's fake drug mafia

LAGOS—Nigeria's fearless crusader against fake drugs, Dora Akunyili, was awarded the Transparency International Anti-Corruption Award last year for battling the scourge of fake pharmaceuticals in her country.

But this is not protecting her from harassment and intimidation from the fake drug mafia in her country. This week, there were arson attacks on two buildings that house Akunyili's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC) and last month she received death threats.

On Wednesday, the Kaduna office and laboratory of NAFDAC was gutted by fire and barely 72 hours earlier, NAFDAC's office in Lagos had also burned down when the Federal Government Secretariat building caught fire. The fires were believed to have been started by dealers in counterfeit drugs who are being targeted by NAFDAC.

In December, an attempt was made on Akunyili's

life at her country home in Agulu, eastern Nigeria. Sixteen people implicated in the assassination bid were later arrested, according to Nigerian police.

"The arson attacks will not deter us from waging the war against fake drugs. I can assure Nigerians (that) we shall win the war, because we know we are fighting for the common man," said Nnamdi Ekweogwu, Director of Administration and Finance at NAFDAC.

Nigeria's fake drug market is estimated to be worth \$60 million a year, and most of the spurious medicines come from India and China. Akunyili's own sister died after a fake medication was ineffective in controlling an infection she had four years ago.

NAFDAC wants Nigeria to start domestic production of most medicines within the next decade, to eliminate the import of fake products into the country. ● (IPS)



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March 2004


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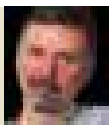
Nepali 1 at SOAS

The only undergraduate students in the Western world who can navigate their way though Nepali newspaper texts on demands for constitutional reform

It's Tuesday morning in the small town where I live, 30 miles from central London. I stumble out into a raw March wind to join a small bunch of commuters huddled on the train into town.

On the train I pull out my copy of *Himal Khabarpatrika* and read of King Gyanendra's recent *abhinandan* as a Hindu Samrat. Most of my fellow passengers read the *Daily Telegraph*, one of this country's more boring broadsheets. Somewhere high above the thick grey sky, the sun is

LONDON EYE
Michael Hutt



probably rising as I emerge from Euston station and trudge across Bloomsbury, but

it makes very little difference. London in winter is mostly greys and browns, broken only once this year by the purifying brightness of snow.

Room 389, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. 'Nepali 1', a smaller than usual class of only six students this year, drifts in for its 9AM lecture. Many years ago, some bright spark involved in timetabling at SOAS decided that the early morning slot was best for language classes. As I watch my students yawning and rubbing their eyes I curse him once again.

But they quickly wake up and apply themselves to the task of understanding why it is that when Nepali-speakers want to construct a conditional sentence they use the past tense of the verb to talk about things that might happen in the future. *Aaja kasari aunubhayo* I ask each one of them: how did you come today? Some came *hidera*, 'walking', some came *tyubbata*, 'by tube'. If you broke your leg tomorrow, how would you come? I ask one. If the tube were to shut down tomorrow, how would you come? I ask another.

They cope well and before long the one student who has never set foot in Nepal is telling us how he would get to SOAS on a day in which he broke both his legs, the tubes were on strike, the buses all broke down and it snowed heavily.

A quick slurp of coffee and on to my next class. These two final-year undergraduates spent eight months in Kathmandu last year and their Nepali is now solid enough for them to tackle the difficult language employed in Nepal's news media. My friends down the road at the BBC Nepali Seba are always happy to provide a tape or two for listening practice, and to begin with we listen to one of these, with me writing up each unfamiliar word on a whiteboard. Both students find the pace of the broadcast very fast and we replay each sentence several times. I confess that I have not prepared in advance and I have to think on my feet, but I survive (I think).

Having deciphered a lengthy radio news item on the recent polio inoculation campaign, we turn our attention to some articles downloaded from the web edition of *Kantipur*. I provided them with vocabulary lists last week and they have



prepared this material in advance, so we sail through several reports on recent political manoeuvres in Kathmandu. I think they may be the only undergraduate students in the Western world who can navigate their way through Nepali newspaper texts on demands for constitutional reform, and I'm proud of them. But they remain grumpy about the BBC tape: can't I slow it down somehow?

I often hear myself telling people that the Nepali studies program at SOAS is unique. Of course, SOAS is not the only Western university where Nepali is taught: many students study the language at Cornell and Wisconsin in the USA, at INALCO in Paris and at the Sudasien Institut in Heidelberg, and quite possibly elsewhere too.

However, I think it is still true that SOAS is the only Western institution that offers Nepali as a named element of a Bachelor's degree. Courses in Nepali are also available options within other programs, at BA and Masters level.

The number of undergraduate students who opt to devote approximately 50 percent of their time over a period of four years to Nepali things will never be huge, because this is an undertaking that has to be a labour of love. The largest number we have ever had spread across the four years is 13, with 3 or 4 students in each year.

All of them combine Nepali with another subject taught at SOAS: law, anthropology, art, development studies, etc. SOAS's ability to offer half-degrees such as this is ensured in part by the UK government's provision of 'non-formula funding' for minority subjects. And long may it continue:

we offer degree-level programs in more than 20 African and Asian languages, but only the Big Three (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese) would be viable without such funding.

This year I have had 27 students of seven different nationalities in my courses, almost all of whom have had some previous experience of Nepal. Each year I meet several who have spent a gap year between school and university in a Nepali village, usually teaching English. For many, the months they spend in Nepal are their first extended period away from home, and the experience makes a profound impression upon them. The landscapes, the cultures, the people of Nepal are the context in which they begin to find their feet as independent adults, and they return with a perspective on the world that is very different from that of many of their peers.

Most of these gap year students go on to pursue 'conventional' degrees at 'conventional' universities, but a few are not satisfied with just a rudimentary knowledge of a society that fascinates them; nor can they shake off the strong emotional bond they have formed with Nepal. So they come to us, and we welcome them. All being well, they graduate with qualifications that mark them out as young people of unusual adventurousness and considerable achievement. Several now work in positions that draw heavily on their intimate, linguistically-informed understanding of Nepal.

Others, of course, do not, and use their degrees as evidence of more general academic achievement. Students' announcements of what they are studying at SOAS can provoke some perplexed reactions, and they may have trouble convincing people of the benefits of studying a language and culture radically different from one's own.

A few years ago a Belgian student of mine graduated with a BA in Nepali and Development Studies, and returned home to receive his family's congratulations. He was puzzled when a neighbour began to ask him some very difficult questions about French military history. Eventually, it emerged that some years earlier the neighbour had misheard my student's response to his question about what it was he was studying in London. His reply had been 'Nepali studies' but the neighbour had heard him say 'Napoleon studies'. The implication was that the latter subject might have been rather more worthwhile!

Outside, meanwhile, it's dark again before six. I remember to check the *Kantipur* website, and I find articles there by Krishna Hachhethu and Hari Roka, which I print out for my journey home. I wouldn't want to have to resort to reading a discarded *Daily Telegraph*... ●

Michael Hutt is Reader in Nepali and Himalayan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies. His latest book is *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan*, a book he edited, *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*, is due out soon.

Tourism can be antidote to poverty

RAMESH JAURA in BERLIN

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO-OMT) is urging multilateral development assistance agencies to recognise tourism as an important instrument for tackling poverty, environmental protection, giving economic value to cultural heritage, creating employment and generating foreign exchange earnings.

In a report released in Berlin this week, the UN's specialised agency on tourism also urged the World Bank, regional development banks and the European Union to "provide specific assistance for tourism to least developed countries", stressing on the agencies' considerable leverage with governments of developing countries. "Before providing assistance they should ensure that national and local tourism strategies and policies that address poverty issues are in

place. Individual projects assisted should be required to meet criteria that ensure benefit to the poor," the organisation's secretary-general Francesco Frangialli said.

The report urges developing country governments to include tourism in strategies for poverty reduction and ensure that tourism negotiations in the WTO framework contribute to sustainable development, noting that tourism is a key component of many countries' service exports with power to deliver significant international earnings.

According to WTO-OMT, global tourism arrivals grew by 54 percent between 1990 and 2002, and now stand at about 700 million. By 2020 the figure is expected to swell to more than 1,400 million. Africa and south Asia are expected to achieve growth rates of four to five percent each year. Global earnings from international tourism amounted to \$475 billion in 2002. Tourism makes up a large part of the

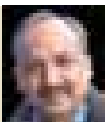
world's growing service sector and accounts for over 30 percent of all service exports. In countries such as some in sub-Saharan Africa, tourism accounts for as much as 55 percent of service sector exports.

WTO-OMT has launched a campaign for underlining the significance of tourism in realising the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to halve poverty by 2015, and, in association with the UN Conference on Trade and Development, also launched a special initiative on poverty called ST-EP, an acronym for 'Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty'. ST-EP aims to encourage sustainable tourism (social, economic and ecological) which specifically alleviates poverty, bringing development and jobs to people living on less than a dollar a day. It targets the world's poorest countries, particularly in Africa and south Asia. ● (IITS)



At least 16 districts face terror and shortages caused by the Maoist blockade. From sick people needing to get to hospital to vegetable vendors and dairy farmers—everyone has been hit hard. In the eyes of the people, the Maoists have revealed their inhumane face. Even ambulances are not safe from ambushes and roadside bombs.

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



The motivation for this blockade is ostensibly the king's visit to the midwest and the army's offensives against Maoist strongholds. The blockade has further marginalised the civil administration and pushed the security forces into the forefront. The king will now rush to the unified command to quell disturbances and also distribute relief and essential commodities to alleviate possible shortages in the blockade-hit areas.

He may visit more areas after the Pokhara felicitation under security cover and project himself as the only hope in the eyes of people who are fed up with the conflict and the dislocation caused by the blockade. The political parties, by their self-centered and power-driven politics, have made it easier for the king to project himself as a saviour. They themselves have neither empathised with the people directly hit by the blockade, nor shown the courage to defy it.

The blockaded areas do not fall within the Maoist strongholds, but in central Nepal, which controls the supply lines to and from the capital. Last week Nepali Congress President Girija Koirala staged an undeclared walk-out from the five-party meeting in Bhaktapur when Amik Sherchan of Jana Morcha proposed that the agitating parties should talk to the Maoists to form a pro-republican front.

While a negotiated peaceful

settlement with the Maoists should always be the preferred option to resolve the conflict, forging an anti-monarchy alliance with the Maoists can only mean joining the armed struggle as well. Simply put, it will mean that besides Sherchan and Narayan Man Bijukchhe, Koirala, Madhab Nepal and Lilamani Pokhrel will also be Comrade Prachanda's foot soldiers.

Koirala understood the implications of Sherchan's suggestion when he staged the walkout, but that alone will not help the Nepali Congress to prove its future relevance. For that, he needs to seize the initiative to hold political rallies—jointly with the UML or by himself—in Chitwan, Nepalgunj and Bhairawa and defy the blockade. Why should the people, even kangresis or UML members, come to

Kathmandu for yet another decisive street demonstration against the king's 'regression' if their politics does not take into account the problems and hardships the people are facing?

The only way to take the struggle against 'regression' to a logical conclusion is by restoring the constitutional process, and mobilising the people is the only way to do that. The people will continue to turn towards the king or the Maoists if the political parties and their leadership fail to identify themselves with the people's main concerns: security, jobs and development.

Koirala should know by now that he can't get the people on his side just by projecting the king as a villain, and that also goes for his

Continued indifference to the plight of the people will decimate the political parties

latest effort to unite two splinter groups of the Nepali Congress. In fact, it is about time that Koirala and other members of the five-party alliance reversed or redefined the priorities of their anti-'regression' movement.

The new platform should be to restore peace and restart development. It should oppose the killing of civilians both by the Maoists and the security forces, and try to convince people that the political parties are the real organs of democracy. Continued indifference to the

plight of the people will decimate the parties and their standing.

The parties need to convince people that they have belatedly realised their past mistakes and that they can be the vehicles to transform the country into a real democracy. They must convince the people that they no longer think the king is the villain of this piece, but a partner in the process and one who is crucial in the process of democratising and constitutionalising the institution of monarchy. ●



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Making a killing on contracts

Why do the Nepali people almost always get the short end of the deal in foreign-funded projects?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

What do the Kali Gandaki, Middle Marsyangdi and Melamchi projects have in common? Answer: they will all end up costing much more than originally planned because of faulty contracts, and the Nepali people will end up bearing the extra cost.

The types of bidding systems and contracts the government, donors and foreign companies adhere to leaves the country vulnerable to almost unlimited cost overruns, which are then passed on to Nepali consumers by the government. Experts say the only reason this works is because government officials and the private contractors are in cahoots to manipulate costs.

They cite Nepal's largest hydroelectric project, the Kali Gandaki A, as an example. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) financed project managed by Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) selected the Italian contractor Impregilo spA because it had the lowest bid at \$130 million for civil construction of the 144MW project.

But by the time the project was completed with a two-year delay, the contractor had billed \$55 million more than the original bid. The contractor blamed labour disputes, political instability and geological complications.

Now, it looks like the Middle Marsyangdi project will go through similar overruns. A conglomerate of German, Spanish and Chinese contractors, Dywidag Dragados CWE, has already added E65 million to the civil construction cost that was agreed at E77 million in the bidding process even though only 30 percent of the work has been completed.

The 70MW project in Lamjung has

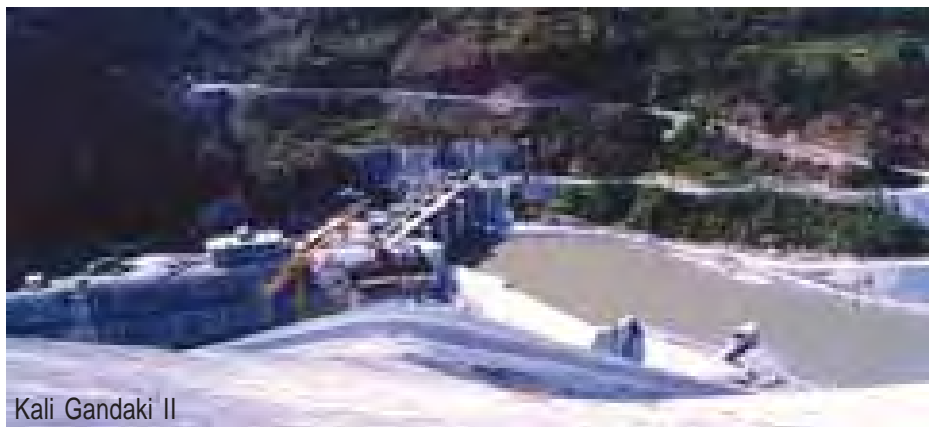
already been delayed by at least two years after a protracted legal battle between the NEA and the contractor. The contractor won the first round after the NEA agreed to pay the E77 million overrun. The next round, NEA officials say, could begin anytime. With this week's Maoist blockade, the construction has again come to a grinding halt.

Experts interviewed for this investigation told us the whole process is a scam because contractors take advantage of the corruption and domestic turmoil within Nepal to practice 'dive bidding': quoting unrealistically low prices with the intention of padding it with huge overruns as the project progresses.

Next, it looks like the turn of the mammoth Melamchi Water Supply Project (MWSP), which aims to bring snowmelt through a 27km tunnel to Kathmandu Valley. Having received 30 percent of the Rs 450 million deal, the Korean contractor, Haniel Koneko, has abandoned the road construction component of the project without even finishing 20 percent of the work. Just like the Kali Gandaki and Middle Marsyangdi, the Korean contractor in Melamchi has also demanded compensation.

"They want compensation for everything under the sun," complains MWSP Executive Director Dhruva Bahadur Shrestha. "They want to be compensated for bandas that happen elsewhere, they want compensation because it is too windy, or too sunny."

There is a thread running through all these projects: faulty Federation Internationale des Ingenieurs Civile (FIDIC) contracts. They come in two types, open-ended ones with options to add cost for unforeseen overruns, and closed contracts with a cap on project cost. In Nepal most of the government-owned and donor-aided projects have had open-ended



Kali Gandaki II

KUNDA DIXIT

FIDIC contracts.

By themselves, cost overruns are normal. But in countries with weak regulations or political uncertainty, overruns can sometimes be huge.

MWSP's Shrestha doesn't mince words: "The open-ended FIDIC contract has been the root cause of the problem in our project. It lets the contractors do whatever they want." Often, foreign consultants side with the contractors. When contacted, none of the consultants involved in Kali Gandaki, Marsyangdi or Melamchi projects were willing to talk.

The real question is: why isn't the government doing anything about it? The suspicion is that key officials may be hand-in-glove with foreign contractors. Every time the contractors' bill cost overruns, the project comes to a halt, but the government always gives in—as happened in January with Middle Marsyangdi and last year with Kali Gandaki. Worse, despite the terrible track record of open-ended FIDIC contracts, the government keeps signing similar contracts for new projects.

Donor officials say there is nothing wrong with FIDIC contracts, and it is standard operating procedure all over the world. "The contract has an internationally accepted standard and therefore we approve it in the

big projects we are involved in," says Peter Logan, who looks after Melamchi in ADB Kathmandu.

Does that mean FIDIC contracts will remain a development hazard? Nepali financial experts say the government should now press for FIDIC close-ended contracts and fix the price beforehand. "That way there will be no chance of cost overruns and time overruns," says Ratna Sansar Shrestha, a senior chartered accountant.

The Khimti and Bhoté Kosi hydropower foreign joint ventures are cited as examples of how the private sector deals with the issue. Both projects had FIDIC contracts, but these were close-ended. The civil contractor built Khimti at the initially agreed cost of \$140 million, and even finished 12 days before the deadline. Bhoté Kosi was also built at the agreed price of \$48 million.

Water management analyst, Ajaya Dixit, says: "If the private sector can do it, it is a mystery why the government can't." Although the closed FIDIC contract may initially cost more, they allow less room for hanky panky than the open-ended ones. It is clear that the government needs to close this corruption loophole, so that future generations of Nepalis don't have to pay for the sins of those currently in power. ●

Ask what you can do for your country

Joti Giri in the London Eye column ('Herd mentality', #181) admonished non-resident Nepalis (NRNs) for not getting "more business savvy before asking what we can do for the country." Indeed, a few overseas Nepalis and some of their friends in Nepal consider the entire NRN movement a fallacy.

FEEDBACK
Jugal Bhurtel

At times, seeing things in the right perspective through the famously dense London fog probably gets much harder even for the discerning London Eye. Giri insinuates that participants at the first NRN Conference last October in Kathmandu were mainly *tanduri* cooks returning to Nepal in search of recognition and the Nepali Diaspora itself is a "community with herd mentality".

Often, the confusion arises when we start comparing an NRN with an NRI (non-resident Indian). There are second, third and fourth generations of non-

resident Indians stretching across the globe. An estimated 20 million overseas Indians contribute up to 10 percent of India's foreign direct investment. Many global Indians occupy places of pride in their adopted lands.

The participants of the first NRN conference were not gathered in Kathmandu to have "15 minutes of fame". It was a joint effort of the HMG, FNCCI and a few NRN enthusiasts to forge a constructive relationship between the nation and the diaspora. The results are already in evidence. It has inspired fragmented Nepali communities around the globe to join hands. Several NRN national coordination committees have been formed. The Non-Resident Nepali Ordinance 2060 is waiting for approval, which proposes to provide a clear definition of NRNs and people of Nepali origin (PNOs), recognise the contribution of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, permit PNOs to buy or inherit properties in Nepal, eliminate double taxation

The hastiness with which some intellectual NRNs dismiss prospects of foreign Nepalis investing in Nepal is mystifying

on invested capital, allow their repatriation, permit NRNs to open bank accounts and invest abroad and so on. It took India years to create a legal framework, we achieved it in a few months.

People who ask questions like "who in their sane mind would invest in Nepal under the current political and economic climate?" have no idea that NRNs have already been investing money in Nepal. A team of NRNs from Moscow has spent approximately Rs 1 billion in hydropower, healthcare, media, education and banking ventures. A concept paper for a technical university incorporating medical, engineering and agricultural fields of study with an estimated cost of \$50 million has been submitted to the Ministry of Education.

The Nepali Diaspora of Russia has agreed to finance Rs 9 million to build a *kriyaputri bhawan* in the Pashupatinath Temple

complex as a part of Pashupati Area Development Project. North American Nepalis are financing a hundred-room *bridhashram* project in Devghat. At a recently held meeting in Kathmandu, the International Coordination Council of NRN Association took a bold decision to mobilise Nepalis around the world to explore socially beneficial projects in all 75 districts of Nepal. It sounds ambitious, but a strong tie with Nepal begins from our emotional attachment to our villages, towns and districts. Such projects do not need huge funds. Even a tiny part of the *tanduri sau's* weekly income in London would bring smiles to many children desperately in need of primary schools in remote areas of Nepal.

You really don't have to wait until you acquire such abilities to get involved. Note the Nepali communities in Qatar and UAE

who are discussing the import of vegetables from Nepal. While it may appear insignificant, more than 150,000 Nepalis residing in these two countries are connected to Kathmandu by Qatar Airways flights every week. If they decide to consume vegetables imported only from Nepal, just imagine the impact on vegetable growers back home!

The Nepali diaspora in the Middle East is showing us the way. Will Nepalis in places like London, New York and Washington follow suit in making resolutions to buy 'only-Nepali-tea', 'only-Nepali-carpet'?

Yes, we "must evolve" and "get more business savvy" to achieve more. But we must recognize our initial success, believe in ourselves, and keep moving in a positive direction. ●

Dr Jugal Bhurtel is an environmental researcher based in Moscow

BIZ

NEWS

Nepal passes IMF review

The International Monetary Fund's two-week review of the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) has concluded that the performance of the program has been good.

In a press statement this week, the IMF representative office in Nepal said there had been "good progress against the background of a difficult political and security situation". The three-year \$70 million fund to support the government's 10th Plan and poverty-reduction strategy facility was approved in November last year. The money is to be distributed in seven tranches till 2006.

The IMF mission was headed by Hisanobu Shishido and completed its review this week. It recommended that the second tranche of \$10 million be transferred by May. The review mission found that Nepal met all its macroeconomic targets this year.

Agriculture and manufacturing have done well despite the insurgency, and there has been a rebound in tourist arrivals. GDP growth is expected at 3.5 percent. "Although the trade deficit has widened, robust remittances have kept international reserves at comfortable levels," the review concluded.

The IMF team also said revenue and regular spending have been in line with the budget targets, but development spending had sagged because of the conflict. The IMF seems satisfied with the government's promise that it will raise development spending this year.

The IMF also found progress in structural reforms "encouraging" with improved tax and customs administration and the resizing of Nepal Rastra bank. The banking sector reform was said to be on track and privatisation was going apace. But the review panel said more needed to be done to enhance debt recovery and address losses at the Nepal Oil Corporation.

NEW PRODUCTS

AWASH: Sahara Industries has launched Sewa Power Wash detergent powder, touting it as fragrant, effective and easy on the hands, for just Rs 7 for 200gm or Rs 16 for 500gm.



PIPING HOT: Panchakanya Industries has released a new range of international-standard PVC fittings, suitable for a series of uses including drinking water supply and waste management. They boast more thickness and durability, plus the high-quality rubber gaskets ensure that there is no leakage.



Yet another year of winter drought, a colder-than-usual spring and the predictable has occurred: electricity shortfalls leading to power cuts.

Most of Nepal's hydropower generation comes from 'run-of-the-river' schemes which use the flow of the river to turn turbines to generate electricity. This means that if the water level in the river goes down, so does electricity production.

The only way to get around this is to store water in reservoirs, but our only dam is Kulekhani I and II, which is situated in a stream that only has enough water to generate 90MW of power during daily peak hours.

After the 144MW Kali Gandaki

hydropower project came into full scale operation last year, the government had trumpeted that load shedding had become a matter of past in Nepal, and officials were even boasting about exporting electricity to India. But a month into the dry season, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has already declared a week-long power cut lasting two hours every day beginning 13 March.

The nationwide power cut is scheduled in such a way that each area of the country will have four hours power outage in a week, two in the morning and two in the evening. So, why the load shedding even after the national grid has the installed capacity of almost 600MW?

Undemanding consumers

Nepali consumers are too meek to raise hell

Min Bahadur Gurung, owner of Bhat Bhateni Supermarket, says Nepali consumers are easy to please. "If an appliance breaks down two days after its purchase, most Nepalis just wouldn't bring it back to the

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



store and demand a replacement. Instead, they would return to buy another appliance altogether."

And that pretty much sums up the easy-going and tolerant attitude of most Nepali consumers when faced with anything from faulty appliances to shoddy products to bad services. Indeed, if there was anything to wonder about on the World Consumer Rights Day that was celebrated last Monday, it was this: In a society where consumers appear to be reluctant to display a do-or-die urgency as to how they want market players and the state to provide them with effective and efficient services, is there any hope for a consumer rights movement? One is tempted to say no, for the time being anyway. If not, consider the delivery of these two services: water and electricity.

The theme of this year's World Consumer Rights Day was 'Consumer and Water'. Yet, as the mercury starts heading north, the

Kathmandu Valley starts reeling under a severe shortage of drinking water. Unfortunately, this is not a new event. Last year was the same story, and the years before too, despite water users' dutifully paying monthly fees to the state-run Nepal Water Supply Corporation.

Surely, in other countries, angry consumers would have been up in arms by now, but not in Nepal. There is anger, yes, but its force is too dissipated to make any difference. The result is that

rest, it is unavailable and unaffordable.

Consumers and the card-carrying activists who are supposed to represent them rarely seem to push for wider and more reliable distribution by asking: How can the cost of production of electricity be lowered? And, using a bundle of schemes, how can power be distributed cheaply across Nepal? Meanwhile, quiescent consumers have quietly yielded to plan life around power cuts.

Similar stories could be told about other sectors such as telecom, fuel and education. In all these, consumers appear to be too meek to raise hell to demand better services and the activists are all too eager to hog media coverage by uttering nothing but platitudes, afraid to make enemies for causes that matter.

And so it goes, on and on. That is why, for various strands of consumer rights movements to really take shape, to have an effect and not be just another donor-funded *jagire* do-goodism in Nepal, a few good men and women have to be single-minded public champions of concerns that consumers hold dear but lack organised outlets to express. Otherwise, Nepali consumers will continue to celebrate occasions such as the World Water Day, but muddle along without demanding much from those who they pay to provide services. ●



government officials buy themselves time by assuring people once again that they are working on ways to provide water.

Likewise, the power sector too is wrapped up in its own inefficiencies. Ninety years after the first spark of electricity was generated in Pharping, only 20 percent of the national population has access to electricity. For the

Too much, or too little water

Mis-timed maintenance on Marsyangdi and drought trigger power cuts

The falling water levels on snow-fed rivers have reduced the capacity of powerplants like Khimti, for instance, by two-thirds to less than 20MW. But to make matters worse, NEA has decided to shut down the 70MW Marsyangdi power plant for maintenace just at the exact moment when the power demand is at its peak and supply is at its lowest. Marsyangdi was damaged by landslides and flash floods last monsoon.

"We are clearing the river bed where a lot of boulders were

deposited during the floods," an engineer at NEA's Load Dispatch Centre told us. But, why in the dry season when the capacity of all other run of river plants has gone down? "Because this is the right time when we can make the corrections with minimum load shedding," the engineer said.

Despite misgivings about large dams, experts say the time may have come for Nepal to contemplate a large storage project to meet power shortfalls during early spring when the snows have not started melting

and there is no rainfall. They say the best option would be to turn the Australian joint venture West Seti project in western Nepal from an export-oriented power project into one supplying the domestic market when it comes on stream in seven years.

NEA officials say that as long as all except one of their powerplants are run-of-river types, power cuts will be a regular feature in the future as demand rises and power supply is concentrated during the monsoon months. ●

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Isolating Pokhara

The Maoist strategy of total disruption seems to be working

RAMESH POUDEL in POKHARA

The Maoist blockade of more than a dozen districts of central Nepal couldn't have come at a worse time for Pokhara.

At the height of the trekking season, hundreds of tourists bound for the Annapurna circuit or taking buses to Kathmandu are stranded. For this tourist-dependant town, when visitor numbers go down everyone from vegetable farmers to paragliding companies are hit.

Students waiting for their SLC exams have been affected, traders have lost business, transporters have no income and, for the most part, it is the poorest people who have suffered the most.

Now, the government is telling the people of Pokhara to show up in large numbers for the public felicitation of the king on 25 March, but they are in no mood to do so.

Pokhara's bazars wear a deserted look as trucks bearing food and supplies from Birganj and Bhairawa have been disrupted. Basic commodities like salt, oil and sugar have disappeared, and if available, they cost up to 50 percent more.



Burnt out hulk of a truck carrying cooking oil on the Prithibi highway.

KIRAN PANDAY

Similarly, farmers who used to supply vegetables, meat, eggs and milk from outlying areas like Syangja, Parbat, Baglung, Myagdi, Gorkha, Tanahu and Lamjung are badly affected. "There is no light in the villages and now we cannot even light the lanterns because there is no kerosene," says Bhanu Regmi, a student from Parbat who has come to Pokhara to see if he can buy essentials. Maoists have sent back mules carrying milk and other

produce into Pokhara.

The Maoists have a foolproof way of enforcing their blockade: burn buses. After three local buses in Lamjung and Dhading were set on fire last week, no bus owner dared ply the highways.

"More than 80 percent of our investment in the vehicles is loaned, we need to pay the interest," says Dhaulagiri Zone Transport Coordination Committee Chairman Hari Khanal. Pokhara's produce, like

noodles and confectionaries, have also started piling up. Factories have started laying off workers.

The government is still saying the situation is under control and seems to be relying on the Maoists squandering their public support through the blockade. The army has also been escorting vehicles in convoys along the Prithibi Rajpath. Trucks and buses coming to Kathmandu have been taking the old Tribhuban Rajpath since it

doesn't fall under the current Maoist blockade.

On Tuesday, Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani and Home Minister Kamal Thapa arrived in Pokhara and assured transport entrepreneurs that that government has created a 'basket fund' of Rs 100 million to compensate vehicle owners. But bus owners have heard these promises before, and there haven't been too many takers.

The Maoist Kaski district secretary, Jivan, issued a press statement on Monday saying all vehicles would be allowed to operate except government and military ones. He also warned businessmen they would face punishment for hoarding. But even this assurance from the Maoists hasn't erased the fear of bus and truck owners.

FNCCI has calculated that the country is suffering losses of more than Rs 400 million a day from the blockade. "The Maoists have also stopped production units and not allowed us to load and unload our goods, and the figure is sure to rise," says FNCCI vice president Chandi Raj Dhakal. ●

Hello, hello, hello



MIN BAJRACHARYA

A new government policy has deregulated telecom so your call may finally get through

KHADGA SINGH

Since there is no parliament, Nepal can't ratify its accession to the WTO. But the government is using innovative ways to demonstrate its commitment to the process, and one of them is to deregulate domestic telecommunications.

The new Telecommunication Policy 2004 is nothing less than revolutionary: it allows any investor to provide all telecommunication services in any part of the country. All a wannabe service provider will have

to do now is obtain a license from the Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA). Officialdom is now pushing hard to have the new Telecommunication Act and rules approved. "We are working in coordination with the Ministry of Law, and the Act should be in place within few months," said Ministry of Information and Communications spokesman Mukunda Regmi.

Once that happens, foreign and domestic investment applications are sure to flood the NTA. Even before the government came up with its previous policy, there were more than half-a-dozen bidders for the Wireless Local Loop (WLL) service two years ago. The successful bidder then was the Indian joint venture, United Telecom Limited that has made a capital expenditure of Rs 2.7 billion to service to more than 15,000 customers in Kathmandu Valley.

This time, there will no longer be any bidding, everyone is welcome. Investors of any size can open shop for a variety of services including land phone, WLL, Global Satellite Mobile (GSM) and even Internet-related services.

Local potential investors expect half-a-dozen private parties to obtain licenses for the land phone services. There could be fewer investors for GSM, but the most popular is expected to be the wireless local loop. Local businessmen say Indian telecom companies like Reliance, Tata, Airtel and Chinese and Turkish investors are already waiting in the wings.

International operators will not have much trouble creating the necessary infrastructure for telecom services. The government is already laying down a fibre-optic backbone along the East-West Highway with Indian assistance. The first phase of the project is expected to be completed by July this year, and the installation that started in Kakarbhitta has already reached Lamahi in Dang.

"This is a high revenue generating area, so the number of investors will certainly be big," says Nepal Britain Chamber of Commerce President Rajendra Khetan, who was a successful bidder for mobile services two years ago, but never started the service.

Less than two percent of Nepalis have access

to telephones, and the days of the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) were characterised by dramatic expansion of infrastructure in the early 1990s which was never followed up with proper service delivery. To be fair, NTC was shackled by interference from politicians in the late 1990s who saw it as a cash cow. "Later, whenever the corporation tried to go for tendering to allow private operators, it faced petitions at the CIAA," explains Regmi.

Now that NTC will have to share the market with international players, the big question is: will Nepali consumers benefit or will the service providers form a cartel and keep on fleecing them? Given the experience in India, fair competition and open licensing could slash prices and make telephones accessible and reliable.

In case of land phones, some believe, customers will have to pay a little more than what they are paying to the NTC right now: Rs 1 for a two minute call. "That is because the current rates of the NTC are subsidised," notes Khetan. "Private operators cannot provide subsidy therefore the land phone tariffs will be slightly higher. But, in case of mobiles it might remain the same as that of NTC."

Others argue that the NTC's tariff will have to be the cap and other players will have to compete with each other for lower tariffs. "We will not be able to compete with a giant like NTC," says a UTL official.

But under the new telecom policy, even NTC will soon have its shares sold to the public and when that happens its own tariffs may have to be revised upwards or down. The government appears to have decided to let in private operators even while moving forward with NTC privatisation because of Nepal's commitments to the WTO.

Before the accession to the global trade body, some WTO members reportedly had demanded that the government open up the telecom sector. "Countries like the US, EU, New Zealand and Japan had said that they would be interested in investing," NTA spokesperson Kailash Neupane told us. "We promised, so we had to open it up." ●

Louis Banks comes back

SRADDHA BASNYAT

In the 1940s, Nepal had little to offer an aspiring trumpet player. So Pushkal Budaprithi and his wife Saraswati headed to Calcutta, where they had a son they named Dambar Bahadur. Later, when Pushkal changed his name to George Banks, he named his son Louis Banks after Louis Armstrong. Today Louis Banks is India's premier jazz pianist.

At 13, Louis picked up the trumpet and guitar, so George took his son along as he played at various Calcutta hotels, making a name in India as a fine trumpet player and bandleader. Inspired, Louis taught himself classical piano. Over the next three decades he has been instrumental in defining jazz in India. Now, Louis Banks is returning to his roots in Nepal as the headliner for Jazzmandu 2004.

He grew up in Darjeeling, graduating from St Joseph's College at North Point, and Louis has never forgotten his Nepali background. During the late 60s, he was here leading a band at the Soaltee Hotel, and over the years has maintained high aspirations for Nepalis. "Given the opportunity, Nepalis can excel in many fields," Banks says with conviction.

Had he never made it in the world of music, Louis Banks would have dedicated his time and talent to painting. Since his childhood, he was inspired by the work of Vincent van Gough, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and the Dutch masters. Now he's trying his brush in impressionistic canvases influenced by Degas, Monet and a few contemporary Indian artists. Even in painting, his pull to Nepal is strong. "The magnificent Himalaya and the scenic beauty of the land, the rustic character of the people and the great temples are sources of great inspiration."

But Banks is a jazz pianist at the core, even known as the godfather of jazz in India. He has performed with the likes of Yolande Bavan, Charlie Mariano and Charlie Byrd and toured India with Dizzy Gillespie. Banks is known throughout Europe, Australia, Russia, China and the Middle East. He co-wrote and recorded India's first mega Broadway hit and has even hosted a popular broadcast named after himself, The Louis Banks Jazz Hour Special.

Besides being a renowned pianist, Banks is sensational at live acoustic and electronic performances on the keyboard and also as a composer. Far from being

limited to any particular style, Banks is continually improvising, dabbling in popular and mainstream music including Indipop, modern progressive and contemporary jazz and Indo jazz fusion.

This time around he's even considering working Nepali music into his repertoire. "I am considering the possibility of using Nepali music in my fusion. I want to pick up a lot of Nepali music this time and will experiment with it in my musical explorations," he confesses. It'll be an entirely new element in his music and, as he says, "Nepali music is folk art."

Since he was last here 13 years ago, Banks has noticed some changes. "Unfortunately Nepal is taking too long a time to make its mark in the world as a progressive country and capitalise on its indigenous talent. The politics has taken its toll. The people have been let down," he says.

But Banks has returned to inspire the youth here to experiment with Nepali music, combine it with jazz, rock and pop so that their creation reaches a wider audience all over the world. "I want to urge them to achieve a high standard in performance and strive to be world class artists." It's the first time Banks is performing in a concert in Nepal and he says he's honoured and thrilled that he's been invited at Jazzmandu. Banks says without hesitating: "I am proud to be a Nepali and always make that fact known." ●

India's premier jazz pianist returns to his roots in Nepal



KIRAN PANDAY

A quiet spring evening in Budanilkantha was punctuated by the murmur of excited school children. The students had been waiting with eager anticipation for the Jazz for School Children organised under the Jazzmandu 2004 festival and hosted by Budanilkantha School.

After Shillong's Soul Mate and Kathmandu's resident jazz ensemble Cadenza, Max Lolo from Benin took the stage. Within moments, the guitarist had the young audience mesmerised. Many people in Lolo's hometown haven't even heard of Nepal, and we could say the same of Benin here. So what brings an African musician to Nepal anyway? Quite simply, his heart.

Max Lolo, by now a celebrity of no meagre standing in west Africa after his hit single *Assak Pede* last year, comes to visit his girlfriend who lives and works in Nepal. In the process he is making quite a name for himself in our neck of the woods.

It all began last July on his first visit to Nepal when he met the members of Cadenza at the Upstairs Jazz Bar, the band's base. He had such a great time that he decided to come back this year to perform at Jazzmandu. And at Budanilkantha, the kids just loved him. When he slid into the reggae riffs of *Ahizi*, a song about the tradition of polygamy in Benin, the children couldn't stop cheering Lolo on. "My music is international. You can say it has African rhythm and European beat, but it is fusion and anyone can feel it," says Lolo.

The roots are pure African. The music comes from Vodoun where the percussion is spiritual. He mixes this African drums with jazz, creating a sound like no other. Up at the school, Lolo is backed up by Cadenza's drummer and Gaurav Basnyat on base guitar. He's all praise for the Nepali musicians: "Cadenza really understand jazz and how to make fusion and Gaurav is great. He picks up very quickly on the bass. I was very happy to play with them."

This year at Jazzmandu Lolo's had the first big show of his own in Nepal at Yak and Yeti on Wednesday night, Sounds of Africa. He's having such a great time, he's planning to stay three months, and is recording his second album here. Just throw in some madal, Lolo. ●



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ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA



NARESH NEWAR

Sushma Limbu was only eight years old when she hurt her left eye while playing in the family maize field in the village of Imbung in Panchthar district. There was no health post and the nearest hospital was several days walk away.

Her family thought it was just a scratch and didn't pay much attention. Soon, Sushma couldn't see through her left eye. Her parents took Sushma from one hospital to the next all over eastern Nepal. They all had the same answer: there is no cure.

Earlier this year, a team of ophthalmologists from Tilganga Eye Centre in Kathmandu had set up an eye camp in a village near Imbung. Sushma's parents decided to give it one last try to save their daughter's eyesight.

The Tilganga team brought 22-year-old Sushma to Kathmandu for corneal surgery. Waiting in the lobby of the hospital for his sister to come out of the operating

theatre, Santosh Limbu is anxious. But soon there is good news, Sushma can see.

"It's still like a dream," Santosh says exultantly. "It is a miracle." Santosh had brought the family's entire savings with him to pay the hospital, but Tilganga provided the surgery for free.

Every day, this eye centre near Pashupati in Kathmandu is giving back the gift of sight to hundreds of Nepalis. There is still a lot to be done, as Nepal has one of the world's highest incidences of curable blindness. Since its establishment in 1994, Tilganga has helped Nepal make remarkable progress in pioneering modern eye care.

Nepal's Sanduk Ruit and his team of ophthalmologists have turned Tilganga from a local eye clinic into one of the world's best centres for cataract surgery and intraocular lens transplants.

This is one hospital that doesn't just wait for patients to come to it—it also goes out to the patients. Tilganga's regular

microsurgical eye camps in remote areas have examined 80,000 patients and performed 17,500 cataract surgeries in the past five years.

Nepali doctors have even reached beyond Nepal to conduct 3,000 eye surgeries in Tibet and 2,000 in India. It has trained several surgeons and assistants in various ophthalmic institutions of India, China, Bhutan, Sikkim and Pakistan.

Tilganga's real challenge was to convince Nepalis to donate the corneas of dead relatives for transplants. The centre has performed over 840 corneal transplant operations since its establishment, thanks to the Nepali eye donors.

Bhola KC, an eye bank technologist, recalls how difficult it was to convince the people to donate eyes of their dead relatives. When the Nepal Eye Bank started in 1994, it had just one donor, Chini Maya Tuladhar. In 1995, it got two donors but in 1996 again there were none. In a



Anti-clockwise from top: surgeon holds an Nepal made intraocular lens just before the operation, 60-year old Maya Limbu from Taplejung after corneal surgery, leading eye surgeon Rita Gurung with other surgeons operating Sushma's eye, eye bank technologist Bhola KC displays his reserve of corneas, Preserved cornea in an expensive vial.

desperate attempt to find donors, KC and his colleagues tried their luck at the Pasupati cremation ghats to convince the mourners that their dead relative's eyes could help someone to see again. "As you can imagine it was very difficult, but we had no choice," recalls KC.

The results were spectacular. In 1997, the number of cornea donors jumped to 97 and in 1998 the number had gone up to a staggering 547 donors. Today, the Eye Bank has enough corneas to supply Teaching Hospital, Pokhara Eye Hospital, Rana Ambika Eye Hospital in Bhairawa and BP Koirala Hospital in Dharan. Corneas of dead Nepalis have even been flown to recipients in Pakistan, Egypt, China, Thailand and South Africa.

KC's work has been so effective that Nepalis are now actually registering to donate their eyes when they die. "My sister got so carried away that she has decided to donate her eye after she dies," says Risiram Pokhrel, a campus

student. He came to KC's office to register his 16-year-old sister Sadhana from Rupendehi at the Nepal Eye Bank. Her friends also registered their names.

Nepal Eye Bank now wants the government to introduce eye banking and donation in medical courses taught in Nepal, but there hasn't been much interest.

Cornea blindness is rampant among Nepal's rural poor. Children rub their eyes with dirty hands while working in the fields, there is no eye care and almost no awareness about infections. Blindness in Nepal is also caused by vitamin A deficiency or severe dehydration.

In the waiting room, Santosh says his family will now be busy finding a groom for Sushma. "Even a little disability is a blemish on girls in our society. She had no chance to get married," he says. "Tilganga has changed her life." He gets up, elated as his sister is wheeled out of the operation theatre. ●



Nepali technologists at the intraocular production lab(I), verifying the lens' perfection



Eye exports

Tilganga Eye Centre has been making waves with its world-class production of intraocular eye lens (IOL), which are used to replace the patients' damaged natural lens. They are made of a clear plastic which requires no care and becomes a permanent part of the eye.

The Fred Hollows Foundation Intraocular Lens Factory in Kathmandu is run entirely by Nepalis at Tilganga Eye Centre and produces 1,000 IOLs everyday, which are exported to more

than 50 countries. Proceeds help make the center self-sustaining so it doesn't have to depend on donors. The income from the sales also helps aid free corneal surgeries in Nepal and keep costs for cataract surgery low.

"We can easily compete with American manufacturers in quality," says Rabindra Shrestha, deputy general manager at the spotlessly clean floor of the lens factory. Nepal is competing with ALCON, an American company, to supply IOLs to China. The factory also caters to the local market and sells international quality lenses at a much lower price. The state-of-the-art manufacturing facility inside the Tilganga Eye Centre in Kathmandu employs 78 Nepali technicians with a Nepali supervisor. There are no foreigners involved.



What is the cornea?

The cornea is the clear transparent window at the front of the eye which allows light to enter. The cornea can be damaged by injury or infection.

How can a corneal donation help people?

Due to various factors, the transparent cornea becomes opaque like frosted glass and this may result in loss of sight. A damaged or cloudy cornea can be replaced surgically by a procedure known as corneal grafting or transplantation. During this operation, the cloudy, diseased cornea is replaced by a healthy, normal cornea donated from another individual.

Why should I consider corneal donation?

Donating your corneas is one of the most precious gifts you will ever bestow on another human being. This special gift will dramatically improve the quality of life for someone now living in darkness.

How can I become an eye or cornea donor?

Donating eye tissue does not entail any cost to the donor or the donor's family. If you wish to pledge your eyes, just fill out an Eye Donor Card (available at Nepal Eye Bank, Tilganga Eye Centre 4493684, mobile: 981020933). Carry the card with you at all times.



NEPAL IN THE FOREIGN PRESS

War without ends

“The Maoists’ only solid political foundation is their disdain for monarchy, even constitutional monarchy. At best, the platform is contradictory, at worst, a confusing reason to die.”



H THAYER WALKER III

World Press Review 4 March, 2004

WORLD PRESS REVIEW

The village of Solta sits serene on the banks of the Karnali River, nestled amid the jagged mountains of the Kailali district of western Nepal. The river flows peacefully past the village on its way to India, its force exhausted by its long descent from the Himalaya.

The region has a continuous supply of water and a mild, even warm, winter climate—more like the hot plains of India than the Himalaya—that is conducive to year-round farming. You won’t see it on the evening news, but a devastating war is being fought against this serene backdrop.

An hour from Solta, a dusty band of migrant workers rests in the shade of a banyan tree, eating, smoking and comforting their screaming children. They say they are walking to India. In reality, they are running from Nepal. These 42 weather-beaten Nepalis, like millions of other men, old women and small children who find themselves in the same situation, are the real victims of this long civil war.

They walked for six days from a small village in the northwest called Narakot. They hoped to catch a bus the next day and continue to the town of Mahendranagar on the Indian border. From there, they would start walking again, looking for work as unskilled labourers in India. The youngest member of the group was four months old, the oldest 75. Some planned to work in India for three months, some six months, some longer. But many will likely stay.

Poor Nepalis have been traveling to India to work for centuries. But these 42 mountain villagers, like the rest of the 80 percent of the country’s population living in rural areas, have

found themselves caught in a crossfire. An immigration officer at the Mahendranagar border crossing, just one of many, estimates that he sees 500 Nepalis leave for work in India every day. He says he recently saw more than 3,000 Nepalis cross in a single day. A few years ago, he says, a busy day might have seen perhaps 100 Nepalis leaving for India.

Why are they leaving? The stories are the same: Maoist rebels, either on the run from the army or bent on expanding their territory, enter a village. Sometimes they come in small groups of five or six. Other times, hundreds of heavily armed rebels will arrive. On their way through, they ask villagers for food, shelter, money, a son or a daughter. The villagers, subsistence farmers and craftsmen, are in no position to refuse.

When the Maoists leave, the security forces arrive on their trail. When they don’t find armed revolutionaries, the army often singles out villagers who gave the Maoists support, accusing them of being Maoists themselves. Sometimes they are harassed, other times jailed. If the villagers are very unlucky, the security forces will arrive while the Maoists are encamped and the village will turn into a battleground.

A large red and white ‘martyr gate’, one of many similar monuments across the country, stands at the border of Solta. Here, the gate commemorates a husband and wife from the village who had taken up arms for the Maoist cause two years ago and were killed in a nearby battle. A hammer and sickle crown the structure, ringed by the words, ‘The spilling of blood will only make us stronger!’

A group of several dozen Maoists had been in Solta a week before I arrived. When I asked how I could find them, one villager suggested hiking up into the hills. “You don’t find them, they find you,” he explained. As it happened, one found me having breakfast the next morning in the village. He introduced himself

proudly as Comrade Rawal, the second in command at a nearby training camp.

Unarmed, dressed in clean pants and a plaid shirt, he looked as though he could be a teacher or a farmer. The Maoists’ anonymity complicates the security forces’ jobs. As one teacher, explaining the security forces’ difficulties, put it, “Who is a Maoist? Is it you? Is it me? Is it that farmer tilling his fields, or the shopkeeper down the road? Who is a Maoist? If they are not pointing a gun in your face, how can you tell?”

Rawal and I spoke for more than an hour. He was polite and articulate. With his 10th-grade education, he may well have been one of the most educated men in the district. Now 22, he joined the movement at 18. The second of five brothers and sisters, he says he joined because he was tired of seeing his parents toil for nothing. When the Maoists came through his town, speaking of ‘getting respect for the poor’, ‘dividing land evenly’, and ‘creating a society with no rich or poor’, Rawal joined them. His family was proud of him, he explained, because he was an important man in a movement fighting for the rights of the poor. I hesitated to mention that the poor were suffering most from this war.

Rawal was in town, among other reasons, to buy shoes. He said he would return to the training camp, a two-day walk from Solta, after our conversation. The camp houses some 600 armed and indoctrinated guerrillas—‘hardcore’ fighters, as the military describes them. These fighters, Rawal said, eat 2,200 pounds of food a day. They must get their food somewhere, and the pressure inevitably falls on local villages. The camp buys some food with money from looted banks or local and tourist ‘donations’, but Rawal is frank about expropriating the rest from villagers.

Rawal was hard-pressed to cite a country whose political model the Maoists admired, and could not explain what kind of policies

the group would implement were they to come to power. But as he left, he insisted that I write down his parting words. “To the rich of the world, the corrupt,” he said, “we poor are gathering, we are fighting and we are powerful.”

If Rawal is more comfortable with slogans and threats than with proper political platforms, it may be because the rebels lack a coherent ideology. The rebels call themselves Maoists, wave hammer and sickle flags, speak of a ‘New Democracy’ and say they would implement a free-market economy were they to assume power. The two top leaders, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachanda, and Baburam Bhattarai are underground, last seen in India. Their only solid political foundation is their disdain for monarchy, even constitutional monarchy. At best, the platform is contradictory, at worst, a confusing reason to die.

Col Deepak Gurung, chief information officer of the Royal Nepali Army, is a jolly, round man. He smiles often, whether he’s offering tea or explaining the difficulties of fighting a guerilla war in Nepal. Immediately likeable, the colonel speaks seriously, yet knows how to put his audience at ease: admirable qualities in a spokesman.

“Nepal is a combination of the mountains of Afghanistan and the jungles of Vietnam,” Col Gurung explains. The army, he continues, is not fighting one enemy, it’s fighting two: the Maoists and the countryside. Nepal is an ideal chessboard for guerilla warfare. Labyrinthine hills rise into the highest mountain range on Earth, dense bush and jungles thrive in areas too steep or unfertile for cultivation. Maoists can strike and disappear back into familiar territory with ease.

Gurung points to the Annapurna region as an example of the difficulties his army faces. It is no secret that Maoists camp in the hills around the villages of Ulleri, Ghorepani and Ghandrung. Villagers know it, the army knows it and tourists—at this point still safe and out of the crossfire but subject to the Maoist ‘tax’ when traveling through the area—know it. But it’s one thing to know Maoists are there and quite another to dislodge them.

The village of Ulleri clings to the side of a cliff nearly 1,000 feet above a river valley. Any platoon making its way up to the village and into the hills would have to follow the one, well-worn footpath and would almost certainly be spotted long before it reached the village. Nearly every village has at least one scout to send word up the road if the military is on its way. As Gurung put it, “We know they are there, but by the time we get there, it’s too late. They’re gone.”

Numbers are vague, but official army estimates peg the number of Maoist “hardcore guerillas” at somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000, though other estimates range as high as 10,000. The army’s approximation relies primarily on the number of weapons Maoists have seized from security forces in raids and does not include weapons that are being smuggled into the country from flashpoints like Kashmir. When added to the informal militia, variously estimated as being anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000-strong, as well as perhaps 60,000 ‘sympathisers’, the rebels pose a formidable challenge to the military.

At this point, Nepali security forces number around 70,000, a number widely considered to be insufficient to suppress the rebels. Gurung merely chuckles when asked how many troops he needs. “It is purely theoretical how many troops we need,” he says. “At this point, we can only contain and degrade.” Then he pauses for a moment and suddenly the smile drops from his face. “There is,” he says slowly, “no military solution.” ●

After the death of Utopia

Battles are now fought in “wars of ideas”

HANS BLOMMESTEIN

A decade ago, people spoke of the end of history, meaning the ultimate triumph of a liberal capitalist political order. Nowadays, many scoff at that notion as too simplistic. Nonetheless, we are at both the end and beginning of something remarkable.

In the wake of the death of the utopian—and often bloody—certainties of the 19th and 20th centuries, and with fading belief in the liberal welfare state, traditional views about work, retirement, education, the Church, solidarity and other social institutions are changing rapidly. The central driver of all this is today’s enormous acceleration in the underlying pace of technological and economic change. Call it *fast-forward modernisation*.

Of course, the worldwide crash of high-tech stocks in 2000 chilled the hype about a “new economy” that seemed to be emerging at the “end of history.” But falling share prices should not blind us to the fact that on top of the ongoing information revolution, three fresh waves of revolutionary technology are poised to hit: bio-technology, nanotechnology, and robotics. Each is its own industrial revolution, and will profoundly alter our lives and ways of thinking.

Indeed, the revolution is already upon us. For the first time in history, a global technomarket order is transforming the world of finance, business, politics and indeed, physiology, beyond recognition. This new technomarket system is shaped and characterised by a belief in the increasing importance of knowledge, new ideas, innovations and new technologies and a higher pace of what economist Joseph Schumpeter famously called “creative destruction.”

As a result, corporate capitalism is rapidly becoming obsolete, replaced by a creative capitalism in which entrepreneurship, combined with a greater willingness to adopt innovations, transforms the business landscape. Innovative start-up firms become huge companies faster than ever before. But these infant giants are quickly

threatened with eclipse by even newer enterprises.

Take the example of computers. It took 15 years for other countries to compete successfully with America’s Silicon Valley in semi-conductors, but less than five years in Internet technology.

This system provides unprecedented financial incentives to scientists and entrepreneurs to aggressively develop new technologies and thus become rich. But the revolution is not only for the elite: it also offers a realistic (non-utopian) promise of dramatically improved lives for many people around the entire globe - not in 100 years, but in the

everywhere now seems dominated by the “war of lifestyles” that has emerged from today’s emphasis on individual autonomy.

Not so long ago, issues such as the environment, the balance of work versus leisure in daily life, and the role of marriage, abortion and other family concerns were secondary political disputes, as politicians fought over who would receive what share of a nation’s wealth. Now these issues define domestic political agendas.

Much of the new battle over lifestyles is undoubtedly misunderstood, perhaps because debates about them are conducted in a simplistic way: anti-global movements versus multi-nationals,

environmentalists versus corporate polluters, small farmers versus agrobusiness and so on. But, beyond slogans, there is an underlying fault line between those who have the cultural capacity to embrace change and those who resist it by adhering to traditional ideas about how one’s life and, by extension, society, should be organised.

This conflict exists globally. In societies that have been preparing themselves by opening their markets and embracing universal education, the disruptions of this revolution can probably be absorbed and handled. Conflict is most acute in closed societies characterised by a politically repressive climate and culturally

induced obstacles to growth. Such obstacles include the absence of an informed and capable workforce, instinctive mistrust and rejection of new ideas and technologies just because they come from the West, lack of respect for those who acquire new knowledge, and endemic discrimination against women.

The new battle of lifestyles has given rise to new enemies of open societies, such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda. It is no coincidence that terrorism thrives in societies that are intrinsically hostile to today’s modernising values and belief in individual autonomy. So long as these ideas clash, violence will lurk.

● (Project Syndicate)

Hans Blommestein is an economist with the OECD, and author of *After the Death of Utopia*.



foreseeable future.

Nobel laureate Robert Fogel argues that a new synergism between technological and physiological improvements has produced a radically new form of human evolution, which he calls *technophysio evolution*. Only this, Fogel believes, can explain recent trends in longevity, body size, the durability of vital organs and chronic diseases.

These changes are also triggering changes in human consciousness. The result is a litany of “post-utopian” values that include a stronger emphasis on individual freedom and personal responsibility. In this world without utopia, individual freedom is the supreme value.

But, as with any change of such magnitude, there are holdouts. Indeed, politics



Patenting ‘chocolate’

Brazil wants to annul a Japanese trademark of an Amazon fruit

MARIO OSAVA in RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil was able to neutralise the attempt by a Japanese firm to claim a patent for processing cupuaçu, an Amazon fruit belonging to the same family as cacao. But the battle continues on the trademark front. The Japan Patent Office denied Asahi Foods the patent for processing cupuaçu seeds into a chocolate-like product.

The refusal was based on the principle of anteriority, given that the Brazilian governmental agricultural research agency, Embrapa, had sought an international patent for the process in 1999. The Japanese intellectual property authorities officially communicated the decision to Embrapa last month. But another obstacle stands in the way of Brazil’s free use of this natural resource that is autochthonous to its territory.

The same Asahi Foods registered the indigenous Brazilian name “cupuaçu” as its own trademark with the appropriate agencies in Japan, Europe and the United States. The company, based in Kyoto, Japan, even set up a subsidiary named “Cupuaçu International, Inc.” Brazilian producers of jellies and sweets made from the fruit were told by German importers that they had to remove the word “cupuaçu” from the product labels because it was trademarked and belonged to the Japanese firm.

A group of NGOs is working with the Amazon communities that make cupuaçu products to have the registration annulled under the international principle that a proper name of a natural species cannot be trademarked. Brazil’s foreign ministry is also participating in the petition to cancel the Japanese trademark, officially filed in April 2003, and a response is expected from Japan this April.

Meanwhile, the Amazonian producers have either halted exports of cupuaçu products or are selling them with no name or under other names, and this has affected community development programs based

on sustainable use of local natural resources, Pantoja said. It was not until relatively recently that cupuaçu, a fruit much larger than its cousin cacao, began to conquer markets outside of the Amazon region for its various products. Traditionally, only the pulp was used in making ice cream, juice, sweets and jellies. Its seeds were considered waste, and only some were saved for planting more cupuaçu trees. In the late 1980s, Fátima Ribeiro de Nazaré at Embrapa’s Eastern Amazon Centre adapted the cocoa process to produce something close to chocolate. The processing of the cupuaçu seed produces a butter and a cake-like substance, raw materials for a final product that, for legal reasons of protection of cacao production, cannot be called “chocolate”, she said. The hybrid name “cupulate” thus emerged. ● (IPS)





MIN BAJRACHARYA

Emirates blues

Despite woes, workers pursue dreams

PEYMAN PEJMAN in DUBAI

Raju and Jasmine do not know each other. They have one thing in common, though: They both came to Dubai to follow a dream. But while the aspirations of one may materialise, the other seems despondent.

Jasmine, who asked that her last name not be mentioned, came here from the Philippines more than a year ago. Her experience so far has been pleasant. She works at a dry cleaner, has made friends and is saving money.

"Before I came here, although I had some family members who had lived here before, my perception of the country was rather different," she says. "I thought it would be a very conservative country, where you cannot wear shorts and tight skirts or have sex with men. But in fact, it is a very open and tolerant country," she adds with a shy smile.

She says she came here after finishing her computer engineering studies at the state-run University of the Philippines. "Yes, I had a good degree, but I would have to be a manager in my country to make the money I am making here," she adds.

Although money clearly was a factor, Jasmine also came here for the same reason millions of others do. "I wanted to see places. I wanted to explore things beyond my home country," she says.

But even with her can-do attitude, some ironies in this society have not escaped her. "There is quite a bit of discrimination here. Some of it is subtle, some not," she says. She and many others Asian workers here complain that "the locals"—meaning citizens of Gulf countries—look at them as second-class. That is even though about half of this country's 3.8 million residents are Asian workers.

"I think they look at you as if you are lower than them, even though many of them don't openly say it. It's a kind of, 'I can put you in jail if I want to' type of attitude," says Jasmine.

But life can be a lot worse. Just ask Raju, who likewise asked that his last name be withheld. At the tender age of 20, with no Arabic and not much English, Raju answered an advertisement in his native Nepal to come and work for a cleaning company here. "I had just finished high school. There are no jobs in Nepal, so I decided to come, save some money, then I can go back and open my own business," he said.

But things are not working out quite the way he had planned. After working for eight months for the Indian company that sponsored his visa, he and "many others"—all Nepalis—suddenly deserted the company and went to find other work. "We (were) not paid for three months. We had no money to eat, no money to pay rent," he explains.

His case is not unique. There have been a number of articles in newspapers about various unnamed companies not paying their foreign workers for months. Often times, what starts as a simple labour dispute snowballs into a serious immigration issue. "The company that sponsored visa is holding my passport which has my work visa in it," says Raju.

The United Arab Emirates has strict laws for migrant workers, the bulk of whom come from Asia and work in stores and as domestic workers and drivers. Visas are issued for specific work and in most cases are not transferable to other companies. That means when Raju left his previous employer, he technically forfeited his residency. It also means both he and his new employer can be punished for the hiring of a potentially undocumented worker.

"The only thing he can do is to go back to the previous employer, agree to pay some large fine to the employer and get his passport back," says a Nepali friend of Raju's who works, legally, as a security guard.

Emigration issues are touchy subjects in this country. On one hand, the UAE owes much of its growth to foreign workers, Asian, Western or from other Arab countries. On the other hand, the country has long had a problem with unknown numbers of residents here on an illegal status, mostly those who had work visas at some point and have decided to stay after their permits expired.

Twice in the last seven years the country has declared a general amnesty if illegal residents left voluntarily. Sources say close to 100,000 foreign nationals, mostly from India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal went back, but many more remain. "It is as much a labour issue as a political issue," says one Asian diplomat here. He adds, "They (UAE officials) would have a bit of a problem if they choose to seriously tackle the illegal immigration issue. How do you explain to these Asian countries that contributed so much to this country that all of a sudden you want to deprive so many of their citizens of the 'milk and honey' promise, even if they are here illegally?"

(IPS)

Dire strait

Despite common interests, China has 500 short-range missiles aimed at Taiwan

Why is Taiwan's relationship with China so intractable an issue? Why, when they share common economic interests—one million Taiwanese live on the Mainland, working in some 50,000 firms in which Taiwanese have invested over \$400 billion—does China aim 500 short-range missiles at Taiwan?

COMMENT
Orville Schell



The run-up to Taiwan's presidential election on 20 March is one current source of tension. The incumbent, Chen Shui-bian, has initiated a referendum process that might someday be used to ask Taiwanese if they want to formalise today's de facto independence. This infuriates China.

After all, as Mao Zedong told Edgar Snow in 1936, "It is the immediate task of China to regain all our lost territories," explicitly including "Formosa." Since then, China has sought to make good on Mao's pledge.

China's new leadership often evinces a new judiciousness and moderation in its diplomacy. But Luo Yuan, a senior colonel at the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences, recently declared that if Taiwan's leaders "refuse to come to their senses and continue to use referenda as an excuse to seek independence, they will push [their] compatriots into the abyss of war."

In an age when self-determination is a hallowed principle, how is it possible that Taiwan—which has been part of China during only four of the last eleven decades, and has never been under the control of the People's Republic of China—is shunned by every nation when it deigns to wonder aloud why it should not be allowed to go its own way?

The reasons have deep historical roots. When Mao and the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, they promised

"reunification of the Motherland," which included bringing Xinjiang (the Muslim desert regions of the West), Tibet, Mongolia, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan back under central government control. It became a matter of national pride for a country that had been *guafen*, "cut up like a melon," by predatory colonial powers, to end national feelings of humiliation by restoring itself to wholeness.

Communist propaganda relentlessly proselytised for reunification as a "sacred" duty.

Over the last two decades, almost every other plank of the Communist Party's platform (worldwide people's war, proletarian struggle leading to a classless utopia, a triumph over global capitalism, etc.), has been abandoned. This leaves unification as the last tie to Mao's revolution and justification for one-party rule. China's leadership plays up this "revolutionary" commitment, for it helps generate nationalist sentiment, one of the few things (besides strong economic performance) that legitimises the Communist monopoly on power.

China and Taiwan have struggled politically even as their economies become increasingly unified. In due course, they may well be able to become more unified on the political front—if they do not push their disagreements too aggressively. For economic convergence, if allowed to ripen, could set Taiwan and the PRC on an evolutionary course toward common sovereignty.

How can such a scenario be realised? China must declare, loudly and clearly, that greater

democracy, not mutant Leninism, is its ultimate political goal, and that as this evolutionary process takes place and the political climate becomes more congenial, they look forward to discussing how to better weave a political, as well as an economic, fabric with Taiwan.

For its part, Taiwan needs to calm down. Its leaders must understand that, even though "independence" may sometimes seem like a logical scenario, Taiwan is a small, vulnerable island, and China an emerging superpower. Even though Taiwan may have a "right" to independence, its leaders need to remind their people that provocative actions will gain them little.

In 1973, as Sino-US relations were thawing, Mao admitted to Henry Kissinger that, though he did not believe reunification would come peacefully, "We can do without Taiwan for the time being, and let it come after 100 years... Why is there a need to be in such great haste?"

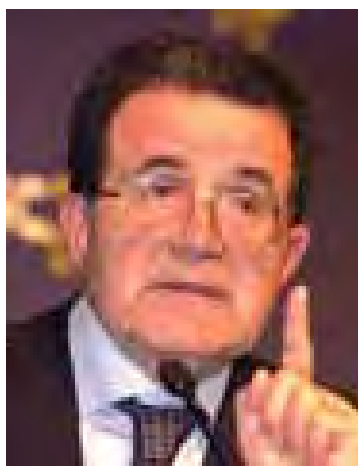
Mao's advice is not bad. China must take to heart its newfound dynamism and strength, and write a new scenario for its relations with Taiwan that emphasises persuasion instead of missiles. For the first time in fifty years, China and Taiwan share real interests. What blocks matrimony is China's lack of democracy. Most Chinese would probably like to see this absence remedied as much as they favour full reunification. Only democracy in China can bring lasting peace to the Taiwan Straits.

● (Project Syndicate)

Orville Schell is a noted historian of China and a Dean at the University of California at Berkeley



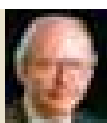
The age of neo-social democrats was little more than an episode



The last half-century has seen the end of ideological politics in much of the world. First came the apocalyptic collapse of fascism as Hitler took Germany with him into a collective suicide. Fascism's demise was followed by the more gradual disintegration of communism after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's

COMMENT

Ralf Dahrendorf



revelations of Stalin's crimes. The failed revolutions in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 foreshadowed the eventual failure of the Soviet empire in 1989.

While these pseudo-religions collapsed, a benevolent ideology of social democracy dominated much of Europe. Its core was the belief that the state could provide both stable economic growth and social welfare to cushion the negative side effects of free markets. Not everyone subscribed to this theory, but it was the West's strongest political force for several decades. Christian Democrats, and even conservative parties, adopted its tenets.

But by the early 1980s social democracy had exhausted itself. It had simply been too successful to remain a force for change. Moreover, it had brought about new rigidities, notably

bureaucratisation and, that deadly phenomenon of the 1970s, stagflation—economic stagnation and high unemployment coupled with galloping inflation.

The reaction to this malaise came swiftly and it had a name—well, two names: Ronald Reagan and, above all, Margaret Thatcher. "Thatcherism" was not really much of an ideology; it was more a gut reaction to the stagnant 1970s, an attempt to loosen the bureaucratic straitjacket of the state and to reveal that not everything that arose from state benevolence was good. Even the word "neo-liberal" exaggerates the intellectual coherence of this counter force.

This change in political direction coincided with—indeed, was perhaps responsible for—the process that we now call globalisation. Thatcherism plus globalisation had many liberating consequences, but the combination also created new social problems, begetting losers as well as winners.

The Thatcherite counter-revolution was so successful that it, too, began to incite countervailing pressures. By the late 1990s, the political scene almost everywhere came to be dominated by the desire to combine competitiveness and

growth-induced wealth creation on the one hand with solidarity, justice and social cohesion on the other. Both were to be achieved within a liberal order.

This is the main political project in most free societies and it is in principle acceptable to all major parties. Yet some tried to turn it into a new ideological edifice. They believed that a new age of social democracy had dawned, and for a while they sought to prove their point: Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Gerhard Schröder, Romano Prodi, (*see pics, above*) even some of those elected in the postcommunist countries seemed to belong to this political camp. The new "Third Way" spreading from Washington to London to the rest of the world seemed to embody these leaders' own ideology.

As it turned out, this episode was even shorter-lived than the conservative counter-revolution. Indeed, it was no more than an episode. Some of us always suspected that the Schröder-Blair idea of "New Labour" or, in German, the "New Centre," had no real basis. Soon it emerged that not all its apparent supporters actually supported it; when

Chancellor Schröder's proposed reforms caused squeals within his own party, he quickly dropped much of the Third Way program like a hot potato. At the same time, Blair found more sympathy for the Third Way with his Spanish conservative colleague José María Aznar than among many social democrats.

The apparent hegemony of neo-social democrats began to crumble after only a few years. Aznar was not the only conservative to replace a socialist government in the Mediterranean world, and the recent defeat of the socialists in Greece is unlikely to be the last. The Benelux countries, some Scandinavian states and many of the new Europeans of east central Europe have chosen traditionally right-of-centre parties. The German Chancellor and his "red-green" coalition still clings to power but is today severely weakened. Even Tony Blair is struggling to hold on.

All this does not augur a new change of direction in Europe. If Schröder gave way to the Christian Democrats, indeed even if President Bush lost to his Democrat challenger, this would

not imply the dawn of a new age. Domestically the one and only issue in most countries remains the same: how to provide a sustainable basis for economic growth in the harsh climate of the global marketplace while at the same time maintaining solidarity and a sense of fairness throughout society. Whoever governs must try to square this circle.

This would truly be the end of ideology at last, were it not for the new challenges arising from the temptations of various kinds of fundamentalism. Versions of nationalism as well as the ascendancy of religiously tinted forms of *intégrisme* threaten the fabric of a free world. The inventors of the Third Way mostly overlooked the value of individual liberty, but it is this that remains the single most important issue in a world where open societies still face mortal enemies. ● (*Project Syndicate*)

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The EU spends most aid on itself

STEFANIA BIANCHI in BRUSSELS

A new report from the European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union (EU), shows that most EU aid is spent on itself. In 2002, donors spent more resources on administrative overheads (\$3.1 billion) than on basic health and education in poor countries—an allocated \$2.7 billion.

The report says most member states insist on applying their own national procedures when they manage their development aid in recipient countries, meaning recipient countries are faced with a multitude of different reporting requirements. "This is imposing an administrative burden on these countries which is at times crippling their already weak administrative capacity," said EU aid chief Poul Nielson.

The Commission is proposing a common legal framework for aid implementation procedures. Other suggestions include improving the coordination of multi-annual

programming and analytical work and outlining local EU action plans for coordination and harmonisation in partner countries where two or more EU donors have a cooperation program. Nielson said that the Commission would also table a proposal soon for the full untying of Community aid to deliver more "efficient aid".

But the European Commission needs to set an example first, says ActionAid, a Britain-based NGO. "It is untenable for the Commission's discourse to be strongly in favour of aid untying whilst at the same time issuing contracts requiring all goods for EC funded projects to be purchased in EU countries without any regard for principle or practicality," said Louise Hilditch from ActionAid. Institutions responsible for new legislation to untie aid should adopt the measures "as a matter of urgency," she added.

The EC report shows an overall increase in aid. Based on current forecasts, the EU aid budget will increase from \$38.6 billion in 2004 to \$47.2 billion in 2006. That

figure would represent 0.42 percent of the EU's gross national income (GNI). The EU has pledged it will "examine the means and time frame for each EU member state to reach the UN target of 0.7 percent official development assistance of GNI, with an intermediary target of 0.39 percent by 2006." According to figures released on 11 March, the EU is set to exceed these targets.

"While we welcome the progress on aid levels, we consider that the EU should not lose sight of the 0.7 percent target which is, of course, the original commitment," Hilditch said.

Nielson said enlargement of the EU in May "would not jeopardise these targets. All accession countries have started to make the transition to becoming donors." The accession states gave aid worth 0.03 percent of their GNI in 2002 on average. This commitment is expected to rise to 0.11 percent by 2006. ● (*IPS*)



Democracy in a time of active monarchy

Madhab Kumar Nepal in *Drishti*, 14 March

From the king's interview in Time Magazine and his statements in Nepalganj, we are getting to hear a new definition of democracy. The king has triggered a new debate on what kind of democracy we want: a guided democracy in which all Nepalis become slaves and compromise their democratic rights, or a democracy that protects sovereignty and ensures that the state power remains with the people's representatives? If we follow the king's definition, we will have to forget the worldwide concept of democracy. But if we do not subscribe to the king's theory, we will have to go for democracy in the real sense. It should be a democracy that does not reel under the black clouds of autocracy and does not run the risk of being hijacked. Today we face a big question of the relevance and the justification of monarchy in the country. We did try to convince the king and bring him back to the democratic system, but we were unsuccessful. Instead, a succession of political parties, leaders and people with dignity had to face humiliation while trying to persuade the king. In the meantime, the taste of power made the rulers forget and even dismiss democratic achievements.

We are hearing about elections. It is a ploy to remain in power. The nominated prime minister keeps on harping about elections which are just not possible in the present circumstances. Another trick could be to stage the drama of elections and get the supporters in the fake parliament to keep the country in the shackles of slavery. But both of these options will not end the conflict in the country. Instead, clashes will increase, and that will be the way of our life. This conflict, however, will decide that there must be no compromise on our liberty and rights.

The Maoists have become a serious hurdle in our movement. On one hand, they protest inequality, the undemocratic system and feudocracy of the king, but on the other, they spread terrorism by murdering political workers and innocent people. We have repeatedly tried to make the Maoists correct their mistakes.

We admit that political parties have made mistakes in the past and that they must realize their follies. Some people in the parties have committed crimes too. There is a need to stop such crimes and punish the culprits. But it is not correct to implicate all the parties just because few politicians did wrong in the past.

When we talk about punishment, we do not mean that the people's rights to punish the guilty ones must be transferred to the king. What we mean is that the king must remain within the framework of a constitutional monarchy. But if the king is not satisfied with the idea, it is time to ask if constitutional monarchy really suits the soil of Nepal.



MIN BAJRACHARYA



PADAM GHALE

Another destroyed bus along the Mugling highway this week.

Dang threats

Rajdhani, 14 March

Under Maoist pressure, government officials in Dang have been forced to leave their official residences. In the district headquarters of Ghorahi alone, almost all 40 officials of different agencies have shifted elsewhere from the quarters they are officially entitled to.

The Maoist Tharuwan Autonomous Region 'People's Government' of Dang has prohibited the operation of government offices from Sunday. It has also asked government officials not to go to the office.

"We are shifting because the rebels have threatened to blast bombs in the official residences," said an official while he was packing his goods at the official residence in Ghorahi. The officials have been receiving threats to leave or to suffer the consequences. Many of them have now taken refuge in houses of friends and relatives. Some have rented rooms in hotels. More than 1,400 civil

servants are in a dilemma about whether or not to go to their offices. The rebels have also declared a blockade in Dang for an indefinite period.

Bandanomics

Kantipur, 13 March

A recent study has revealed that each Nepali incurs a loss of about Rs 47 and the nation as a whole Rs 1 billion in losses from each day of banda or general strike. The Kathmandu Research Center says Nepal hasn't gained anything from the series of bandas the country has gone through in the past decade, and they have only added to the woes of our already troubled economy as it has piled over the country's debt. The study points out that among the most affected sectors due to this frequently called banda programs are education and tourism. A single day of banda means more than Rs 3.81 million of government investment in the educational sector goes down the drain. (Nepalnews.com)

Child labour

Dil Bahadur Chhatyal in Dipayal Kantipur, 15 March

Kalpna Sunuwar is the pride of the Dalit community in her village, most of whom cannot go to school because they can't afford to. But 11-year-old Kalpna works every morning and evening near the Seti River breaking boulders to make gravel to earn enough money to pay her way through school. Working side by side with her mother near the riverside, Kalpna also contributes her savings to augment her family's income. Earning Rs 800 a month, she manages to buy textbooks, pens and other stationery. "I give the remaining money to my mother," says Kalpna.

Sometimes, she has no time to finish her homework, but the teacher doesn't understand and spansks her. More than half the Dalits in Dipayal, especially girls, can't afford to go to school. Not a single girl out of 100 Dalit families in Dipayal has completed



Girja : Our movement will now be more powerful!
Madhab : ..which means do or die!
Caption : Speaking but not listening

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 14-28 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"Bhutan should be committed to implement the agreement (as per the 15th round of talks)," Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bhesh Bahadur Thapa, in *Annapurna Post*, March 16

school. Even if the children get the opportunity to study, they are unable to concentrate and continue schooling. “Children go through so much mental and physical pressure that they won’t get the chance to progress in life,” says Kumar Tailor, a Dalit activist from Doti.

Ban bandas

Baburam Khadga in *Samacharpatra*, March 15

The last nine years of a violent Maoist rebellion has taken its toll. And now in the name of pressurising the government, they have started to organise a series of bandas in which the innocent civilians suffer the most. Fed up with the frequent strikes, the Nepali public has started to question the Maoists’ real intentions. After all, it’s the civilians who suffer the most, affecting their livelihood, health and children’s education. And the



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worst situation is for the daily wage laborers who have to work everyday to make a meagre income. They lose a day’s meal if there is a banda. While the business community complain about the country bearing a loss of a billion rupees in a single day’s banda, there are other significant problems faced by the ordinary people. In the five-day banda, a pregnant woman in Dharan lost her life when she was not able to reach the hospital on time. Strikes are nothing new for the Nepalis. During the multi-party governance also, people had to go through the same ordeal of the politicians using strikes as their weapon against the government to fulfill their political aims. And it was especially the CPN-UML that organised most of the strikes when they were the main opposition party against the Congress government. But now people have started to rebel, they are fed up with the Maoist attitude that they can intimidate anyone. Even the Maoists eventually gave in to the public frustration that they decided to call off the strike on the third of a five-day strike. What surprised everyone was the government’s cowardice by not mobilising their white-plated vehicles. On the other hand, civilians were brave enough to take out their cars and motorcycles on the street.

The Maoists have to realise that their anti-people activities

will never make their movement a success. And this is possible only if they stop the killing, violence, spreading terror as well as calling for strikes.

Unreformed

Space Time, 15 March

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has expressed concern regarding a decreasing development budget, the absence of good governance, non-implementation of institutional reforms and the deteriorating law and order situation in Nepal. An IMF team is here to evaluate Nepal’s six-month performance on the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF), under which it has committed loans of more than Rs 5 billion for the next three years. To get the facility, Nepal had made commitments including institutional reforms. The team is said to be dissatisfied with the country’s performance, especially

in the reform areas and has stressed on anti-corruption measures. A high-level government official said that the team has asked the government to stop increasing the defence budget under different headings and to keep expenditure within the determined limits. He said the IMF officials wanted the government to gradually withdraw from public enterprises and prioritise privatisation. They have also asked the government to discontinue subsidies on petroleum products and to revise prices in line with those at the Nepal-India border. The government has assured the team that the petrol prices would be reviewed and that a cabinet decision would be taken soon.

The IMF team has drawn the attention of the government for not being serious on the financial sector reforms program under the World Bank loan. Similar to World Bank’s complaint, the IMF team has also charged the government of not cooperating with the Nepal Bank Limited and the Rastriya Banijya Bank to collect loan repayments from blacklisted debtors. “The team has even cited an incident when Rastriya Banijya Bank officials were chased away when they had visited the office of Maha Laxmi Sugar Mills to recover the loan,” the official said. “They have also marked the fact that the government was unable to provide security to the bank officials.”

Blaming messengers

Annapurna Post, March 15

Information and Communications Minister Kamal Thapa has accused the Nepali media of panicking the public and taking press freedom for granted. He has urged media not to cover news that would terrorise the public. Sure, it is unethical to report news that sows fear and sensationalises. But the government should also look at how media has helped to boost public morale. Each individual has subjective views, but in a democratic country, the media is not subject to government control over what and how news should be presented. Journalists are also accountable and it will be detrimental if they misuse the power of press freedom.

It is unreasonable to say that the media is exaggerating reports of human rights abuses by the Maoists and security forces. The bombing of a bus and the blockade by Maoists deserve to be made public. The story of the Bhojpur attack needed to be told. It is a cliché to say that “anything can happen during a war.” One thing is for sure: there is more press freedom today than ever before and we owe this to the evolution of democracy in this country. The Nepali media is aware of its public service role, but the minister’s statement is biased and he is blaming the messenger for the bad news.



Nepalnews.com

Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-28 March

Far away from home, Maya never used to miss reading news from Nepal on Nepalnews.com before going to classes every day. One day, when she did not arrive in class on time, her friend Samjhana was concerned. Maya used to be always punctual. With her teacher’s permission, Samjhana went to Maya’s room to look for her. The door was open. Maya was lying face down in front of her monitor, which displayed Nepalnews.com with a headline ‘Husband and wife killed in early morning assassination in Kathmandu’. They were Maya’s own parents.

Radio Mao

Sanghu, March 15

Nepalgunj—Maoists have launched a regional FM radio station, aired from an undisclosed location in Nepalganj. The three-hour daily broadcast can be heard from 6:30-7:30 AM and 6-8PM on 94.2 mhz on the FM band and consists of communist songs, news of Maoist activities and adventures as well as some entertainment programs. The radio also runs commercials from local business firms and industries. Besides Banke, Bardiya, Surkhet and Kapilbastu, the radio program is also accessible across the border in India. There are reasons to believe the Maoist transmitters are located in India.

(Nepalnews.com)



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Burmese days

Tul Bahadur Pun joined the British Army during the Second World War and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery in Burma. Continuing his saga, Pun recounts landing in a glider deep inside Burma. This serialisation of the testimonies of retired Gurkha soldiers is translated from *Lahurey ka Katha* by Dev Bahadur Thapa.



The Japanese had advanced to Manipur when we confronted them. On their arrival at Manipur, they sent word to us that the following day they would have morning tea in Peshawar. Maybe they would, since they were a strong force. Their headquarters were in Moulu in Burma, where they had stored their weapons and supplies. Our strategy was to capture Moulu by cutting off their supply lines rather than confront them head-on. So, we marched through the jungle and approached Moulu. We had 50 rounds of bullets and 7 cases of rations to last a week. The commander gave instructions to carry as much as we could, but said we must stock up on tea and salt. Since water is available

everywhere, we could somehow survive by having boiled water mixed with tea and salt. At nightfall we reached the spot. A large contingent of troops was approaching on the road under which we had laid a landmine but we didn't have time to fix up the fuse. Since they had arrived by train, it was impossible to detonate it then. We arrived at the conclusion that there is no sense in waiting since more enemy soldiers would soon be there. We detonated the explosive and the bridge was blown up. The enemies occupied a hilltop and had their brigade stationed at a nearby town. From time to time they came to look, but did nothing else. In the previous encounter we had captured one of

their wireless sets. We heard everything broadcast about their activities, yet could not decipher a single word because no one spoke Japanese. So we sought the help of a captain who had spent a considerable time in Japan and was well versed in Japanese and put him on wireless duty. He picked up their messages and informed us about their activities and the timing of their attacks. We found out that they had a tank and a second-class brigade stationed there. Their plan was to do away with us since out of one regiment, only half was there and the rest had been posted elsewhere. They had an action schedule with the timings for artillery firing, aerial bombardment, attack by tank and

finally an assault by the infantry. For our part, we built bunkers and hid inside. We collected information about their plans and forwarded the message to higher authorities at Tinsuka. We were told not to worry and they promised to send all possible help. Our planes dropped in wires, rations and weapons before their planes could come. We fitted in wire fences. As zero hour approached we made a plan to capture their defence positions. Only those personnel who could handle heavier weapons were placed in the camp. I was one of those as I was good at operating the three-inch hooker machine guns, rifles and pet guns. Pet guns are used in demolishing bunkers.

Their attack starting with bombardment. Except for one type of bomb, the rest did not do much harm. This was the one that made big ditches, shook everything and sank to a considerable depth and before exploding. Then came their planes. Our planes were nowhere in sight. Their tanks advanced, followed by infantry. Their troops had already approached our barbed wire fencing. Just then our fighter planes arrived and dogfights started in the air. Little parachutes started dropping from the sky, and we wondered why they were dropping food while the fighting was going on, only to realise that they were bombs. They dispersed all over and exploded with loud bangs. If one exploded nearby, everyone was killed. After eliminating the ground force the planes started attacking the tanks. The enemy planes were chased away. Some were burning as they flew away. In short, everything was smashed.

Only one enemy commander and 12 other ranks with him

escaped death. All troops in the frontlines met with death. A handful of troops not in full fighting form were in the camp, yet they too were finished off by our troops. Our next target was to capture Mogaon. We walked eight days to reach the hill. On the ninth day two squads of troops were ambushed. Luckily I escaped unhurt. We established our camp at some distance and sent forward our men for scouting. They found out where the enemy had laid more ambushes. Accordingly, we made a plan and proceeded further.

That town looked like it was surrounded by sea on all sides, the river was so wide. A company had been stationed there and a bridge built. The bridge had been blown up, but the enemy had fixed up wooden planks and made it serviceable. They had designed the bridge so that it made considerable noise when someone crossed it. A full company of enemies had been stationed to safeguard the bridge. As it was the main route leading to the town, we had no other option but to cross the bridge.

First the English battalion attacked the bridge, then the Indian regiments. In all six assaults were made, but it could not be captured. Now came the turn of our Gurkha battalion. I was assigned to scout out the area. Making the slightest noise could spell doom. One should mark the difference between shoes in use now and those used then. Then we had shoes fixed with nails and they made creaking noises. I wrapped cloth on my feet and inspected the right and left side of the bridge. They had put gun posts on both ends of the bridge. After a thorough reconnaissance, I came back slowly and steadily. ●

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SAT-MARCH 20th
Jazz UnCorked
Venue: Shangri-La Hotel
Time: 8:30pm to 11pm
Tickets: 500 (400) with drink

WED-MARCH 24th
Jazz at Patan
Venue: Patan Museum Square
Time: 8pm to 10pm
Ticket price: 1100/600

FRI-MARCH 26th
Supper Club Headliner LOUIS ARMES
Ticket price: 2,000 (400) includes food & welcome drinks
Venue: Hotel Hyatt
Time: 7:30pm to 11pm

SAT-MARCH 27th
All Star Fever
Venue: Hotel Shangri-La
Time: 7pm onwards
Ticket price: 300 (400)

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Cricket diplomacy is bringing India and Pakistan together as never before

The great game

MIHIR BOSE

Pakistan test-fired its new Saheen II missile, which can be fitted with nuclear weapons and can hit cities far into India and the Indians hardly batted an eyelid. Soon after the news broke, an influential Delhi opinion-maker said he thought the missile was fired to reassure the Pakistani public. In any case, he said, the Indians themselves were always testing such missiles. Even a few months ago, not only would the government in Delhi have been vitriolic in its response, but the general mood would also have been sombre, if not fearful.

It is tempting to say that the cricket series between the two neighbours this month, the first in five years and the first visit by an Indian cricket team to Pakistan in 15 years, is what is prompting this rare show of nonchalance. Cricket might bring together two countries that have fought three wars since they became independent from Britain in 1947. They remain such distant neighbours that, even today, each country allows only two journalists from the other country to operate on its soil and both get their news of each other through the BBC World Service.

Still, there are Indians who, while keen on peace, are worried that the cricket tour could go wrong and jeopardise the nascent peace process.

Vinod Mehta, the editor of Outlook, says: "Such is the desire for peace from on high that, although we are in the middle of a very robust general election campaign in India, there is no Pakistani-bashing this time. But, God forbid, should something happen to our star players either on the field of play or in their hotels, it could have fearful

consequences in this country. The fact is politicians want this tour to show that relations between the two countries can be normal."

All this makes this cricket tour very special. But what makes it truly unique is that, for the first time in an India-Pakistan cricket series, it will be the Indians who have reason to feel more confident about the final result.

Historically, India, the larger country, has always had a deep inferiority complex when it comes to Pakistan. On the cricket field, Pakistan, the younger nation, initially led by cricketers who had first played for a united India, have been more successful. While Pakistan has won Tests and series in India, India has yet to win a single Test in Pakistan.

Now 'Shining India' is the campaign slogan of the ruling Indian coalition, which has been promoting an Indian feelgood factor. And this is reflected in the way Indian cricket has performed both on and off the field.

Off the field, thanks to its growing middle class—estimated to be about 200 million—and its appetite for televised cricket, India is now the economic powerhouse of the game. It provides 60 percent of world cricket's income and every second person watching cricket in the world is believed to be an Indian. On this tour, 90 percent of the hoardings round the Pakistani cricket grounds will be advertising products either from Indian companies or from multinationals targeting the growing Indian middle class.

India's new-found economic success seems to be echoed on the cricket field. The Indians have returned from a tour of Australia with a sort of kudos they had not dreamt of. Back in December,

when they left to play the best cricket team in the world, most Indians feared a 4-0 whitewash and thought it would be a triumph if the margin of defeat was kept down. Instead, the Indians drew the series 1-1 and came close to beating the mighty Australians, who are undefeated at home for a decade.

Also, in one of those curious cricketing paradoxes, India will take a bowling attack to Pakistan that would have graced the Pakistan of yore, and, what is more, is led by two Muslims, both hailing from Gujarat, which has been racked by anti-Muslim riots. One of them is the son of the muezzin, the man who calls the Islamic faithful to prayer. He learnt his cricket round the mosque, but is keen to advertise his loyalty to India and the secular state it claims to be.

The Indian side has long enjoyed a reputation for wily spinners, but has always hungered for genuinely quick bowlers. It has long memories of its batsmen being humiliated by opposing pacemen; nothing hurt more than the thumping defeats inflicted by Imran Khan, as captain of Pakistan, just over 20 years ago. Just before that trip, I spoke to a leading Indian batsman who confessed that he expected India to get beaten—and they were duly thrashed.

The mood in Indian cricket and the public at large is very different today. There is a confidence there that hasn't been seen before, a confidence that not even the Pakistan coach, Javed Miandad, whose six off the last ball for a Pakistan victory in 1986 is still seared into Indian memory, may not be able to erase. ●

India-Pakistan Tour Schedule

3 rd ODI	4 th ODI	5 th ODI	1 st Test	2 nd Test	3 rd Test
Peshawar	Lahore	Lahore	Multan	Lahore	Rawalpindi
March 19	March 21	March 24	March 28 - April 1	April 05 - 09	April 13 - 17

Golfing for a cause

Do you have the spine to play golf?

A few recent developments continue to boost our optimistic outlook for golf's future in Nepal. The first was when the recent Himalayan Bank Open Golf Championship contributed all its participation fees towards a Golf Development Fund.

Then last Saturday, the 1st Pokhara Open proved to be a big step towards golf development outside the valley. A trio of avid golfers

made up of Ajay Adhikari, Managing Director of Park & Shop along with colleagues Balram Thapa of German Bakery and local businessman Raju Bhattarai

put together the idea of doing a Pro-Am tournament at the Himalayan Golf Course.

A Pro-Am event is where amateurs get to play in the same group as professionals, and is a great way for amateurs to experience higher levels of golf than they are used to. This is the only event for professionals in Pokhara apart from the regular annual Surya Nepal Western Open. The tournament saw eight Nepali professionals and a number of amateur golfers participating.

It was organised with the aim of developing the standard of golf and to help boost the local tourism industry. The main sponsor was Park & Shop and the supporters were Signature Whisky along with the Pokhara business community, the Pokhara Golf Society, Pokhara Municipality, Nepal Professional Golfer's Association and, of course, the Himalayan Golf Course.

Professional Sabin Sapkota won the tournament with a commendable gross score of one over par 71, and Pashupati Sharma of Gokarna Forest Golf Resort came second with a score of 72. The amateur winner was Capt. MB Limbu with 38 stableford points.

This Sunday, a new idea is being tried out to use the fun of golfing for a cause. On 21 March, a charity event is being held at Gokarna Golf Club to raise funds for the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Center (SIRC) at Jorpati near Gokarna Forest.

This is a new and novel way of bringing awareness to a noble cause and raising funds for a charitable centre that houses, treats and rehabilitates Nepalis who have had falls and accidents leading to back injuries and varying degrees of paralysis.

The innovative part of the event is in its appeal to non-golfers to come up to the venue along with family and friends to relax and enjoy the fresh air, sunshine and lush surroundings and participate in fun events based around the theme of golf.

Meanwhile, die hard golfers will navigate their way around the picturesque and challenging par 72 golf course at Gokarna in their bid to win attractive prizes along with a beautiful crystal replica of the SIRC's innovative logo that gives a modernistic view of a person's spine. The valuable and fun prizes for both non-golfers and golfers have been kindly donated by a host of sponsors.

To conclude, this Sunday's SIRC charitable event has a goal of supporting the center in looking after its patients. For that reason, and as individuals with healthy backs and sturdy spines, I hope you will consider joining us on Sunday for the Tournament or Events. ●

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

SIRC CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

In support of the Spinally Injured, 21 March 2004, Sunday

A FUN FILLED FAMILY DAY AT THE GOKARNA FOREST GOLF RESORT

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For details contact:

Marianna Bhandari: 4708270, Esha Thapa: 4470874, Rana Mani Chai: 3443333

Tickets: Golfers Rs 2500 | Golfers Spouse Rs. 1500 | Non-Golfers Single Rs 1000 | Couple Rs 2000 | Children Rs 1000

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



To see all the Adventures of Herojig - White Man in Nepal, go to www.extreme-nepal.com/cartoons. (©) 2004 by jigne gatto - permission to billboard in Durbhar Marg.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **French language week** 15-20 March. Various programs at the Alliance Française of Kathmandu. 4241163
- ❖ **Dolpo Lives** Paintings by Tenzin Norbu until 20 March 10AM—4PM at Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Paintings by Asha Dangol** until 4 April 12:30—7:30 PM at Gallery Moksh. Closed Mondays
- ❖ **Numafung paintings** until 30 March at Gallery Nine. 4428694

EVENTS

- ❖ **Osho's book exhibition** at Osho Tapoban, 20 March to celebrate their 15th anniversary. Special discounts available.
- ❖ **Family Day** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort to benefit the spinally injured on 21 March, 9AM onwards. Tickets Rs 1800 for individuals, Rs 1000 for children, and Rs 2500 for golfers. 4470874
- ❖ **ELD Workshops** The Power to Plan: Microsoft Project Training and How to Write a Press Release, 23 - 25 March. 4256618, eld@wlink.com
- ❖ **Mind Training and Brain Plasticity: From Contemplative to Cognitive Science** talk by Matthieu Ricard. 25 March at 5:30 PM at Baggikhana, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5542554, 5543017

MUSIC

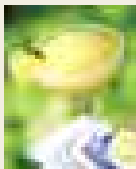
- ❖ **Jazzmandu**
Jazzmandu with Soulmate 19 March at Shangri-la. Tickets Rs 350
More Jazz 20 March, 7:30PM onwards at Shangri-la. Tickets Rs 999 with dinner
Jazz at Patan 24 March, 6—9PM at Patan Museum Square. Tickets Rs 1149
- ❖ **Peter Rowan live** 20 March, 7PM onwards at Indigo Gallery/Mike's Breakfast. Tickets Rs 750, available at Indigo Gallery and Patan Museum Gift Shop
- ❖ **Jazzmandu All Star Fever** 27 March 6PM onwards at Hotel Summit. Tickets Rs 699
- ❖ **Classical & Traditional Nepali Music Concert** at Lincoln School, 19 March 6:30 PM onwards. Tickets Rs 400 and Rs 200 for students.
- ❖ **Peter Rowan at Moksh** 19 March, 6:30 PM onwards inside club Hardic, Pulchowk. Tickets Rs 300. 5528703

FOOD

- ❖ **Margarita Night** on 26 March at Dwarika's. Rs 650 per person, 4479488
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for speciality coffees. Opposite St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632

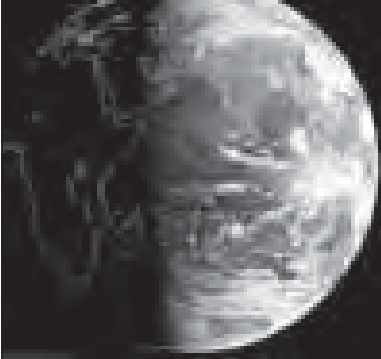
GETAWAYS

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- ❖ **Pure relaxation** Award winning Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500 TMPL Reservations or reservations@tigermountain.com
- ❖ **Bardia National Park** full board, luxury 'on stilts' cottage and pickup, only \$10 a day (park activities extra) at Jungle Base Camp Lodge. Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-18-03-2004 03:00 GMT



by MAUSAM BEED

The first post-winter storm of this season hit the Valley on Tuesday night. The average March rainfall in Kathmandu Valley is 32mm and that shower brought 29 mm. Let's hope it will replenish the water in our parched rivers and ease the power cuts. The cloud-cover, thick haze blown in from the southwest have brought down temperatures somewhat, but the mercury will climb back to more normal levels by next week. This satellite picture taken early on Thursday shows convection clouds over central and eastern Nepal that will continue to bring isolated showers over the Mahabharat hills. Snow flurries will come down to 4,700 m in the high passes this weekend.

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BOOKWORM

CITES Implementation in Nepal and India Ravi Sharma Aryal Bhrikuti Academic Publications, 2004 Rs 1495

Ravi Sharma Aryal presents an in-depth analysis of the implementation status of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Nepal and India, along with suggestions on how to improve the current legislation and enforcement strategies to better protect our wildlife.



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

With a huge all-star cast which includes Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson, Colin Firth and Keira Knightley, Love Actually is all about – what else – love. Set almost entirely in London during five frantic weeks before Christmas, Love Actually follows a web-like pattern of interconnected, loosely related and unrelated stories of a dozen or more various individuals with their love lives, or lack of them. With an uplifting Christmas Eve finale, this one is billed as “the ultimate romantic comedy.”

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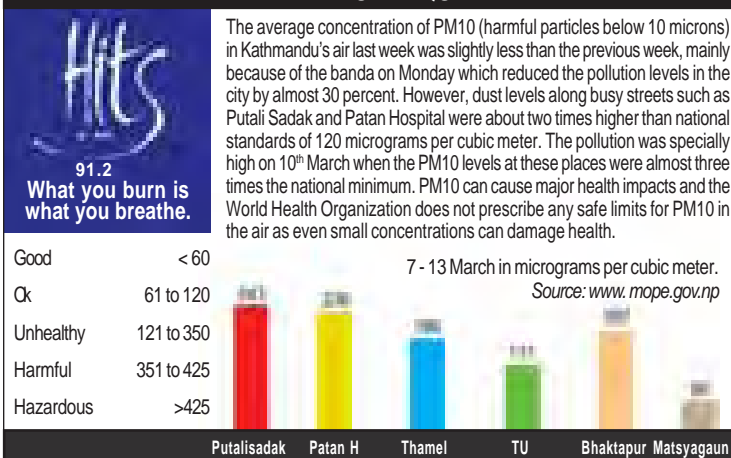
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केम्को: ७:४५, ८:४५, ९:४५

सम्पूर्ण सामग्री सहित रुटिमी सगरमाथा दिवसभरिने तपाईंको सेवामा
(विभाग ३ बजेदेखि राती ११:०० बजेसम्म)

HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDAY

BLOCKADE ARSON: A truck carrying supplies to Kathmandu that was torched by Maoists on the Prithvi Highway on Sunday to enforce their blockade of the central region.



NEPALNEWS.COM

JAZZING IT UP: Eight international and local jazz bands played at the packed Jazz Bazar at the Gorkarna Forest Golf Resort on Saturday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

DIPS AND SECS: the Diplomats 11 thrashed the Chief Secretaries 11 by 7-2 at a charity football match played at the Dasrath Stadium on Saturday. Proceeds went to the Sahara Group, which helps children orphaned by the conflict.



KIRAN PANDAY

BUG-INFESTED: Owners of Volkswagen Beetles took part in a peace rally from Patan to Dhulikhel on Saturday. They raised money for cleft lip surgery and for porter welfare.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

KERO-SCENE: A queue stretches down Lazimpat as people wait to enter the kerosene depot on Sunday.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Ashmina's art

When she was a young girl, Ashmina Ranjit wanted to fly. She'd watch the clouds, feeling envious of their freedom. She took this as a sign that she may one day become a pilot.

However, the future had a very different path in store for her. Ashmina did well in school, and went on to Australia to do her Bachelors in Fine Arts. She came back and started teaching art at Tribhuban University. Anyone who's experienced Ashmina's art will tell you that few walk away from it without questioning the very fabric of their own existence. She's moved away from canvas and is experimenting with new forms, using whatever her expression demands. "My art is social. It's political. It works with women and sexuality. It questions," she says.

These questions have thrown up paradoxes. She recalls a series she painted on women and sensuality to exhibit in Kathmandu. "As a woman I was talking about and expressing sexuality. To know your body is your right. Women need to know their own bodies." Ashmina was accused her of being obsessed with sex, and people put it off to her time in Australia.

Back in Australia she showed the same series. There they appreciated her bold expression. Ashmina recalls, "They said, 'You

paint like this because you are from Asia, from Nepal, you're Hindu. That's where the kamasutra comes from.'" The extremes in reaction in the two audiences threw up contradictions for Ashmina, and she felt no one really understood her work.

Ashmina got thinking about how she could bridge the divide. She wanted to create a platform for artists to interact, an organisation that would invite artists from around the world to see how Nepali artists work and send artists abroad whenever possible. Today, Ashmina has a huge network across the globe and in November 2003 her vision was realised formally as the group 'Sutra'.

At a workshop this week organised by Sutra at the Osho Tapoban forest retreat in Nagarjung, Ashmina and the six other core members of Sutra were working to bridge another gap: a generational one. Twenty-one renowned and senior artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians alike attended a productive four-day workshop. Now at 37, Ashmina leans back and thinks: "Finally, I am flying." ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA



चुरे वन विकास परियोजना
Churia forest development project



The Churia Forest Development Project (ChFDP), is a bilateral project of HMG Nepal and the German Government. The project is implemented jointly by Nepali and German partners and covers the Terai (plains) and Churia (foothills) of Siraha, Saptari and Udayapur districts of Nepal's Eastern Development Region.

The project's goal is to restore the ecological balance of the Churia hills for the benefit of the local population. It aims to develop approaches and strategies for the protection and sustainable management of forest resources in these areas, which could be replicated in other parts of Nepal where similar conditions prevail.

ChFDP was initiated in 1992 and is the only large bilateral project with long-term experience of forest policy implementation in the Terai and Churia region. The last 12 years have shown that the community forestry programme, which has been highly praised in international circles for its success in hill regions, is an equally relevant and valuable tool for the lowlands. Community forestry has helped to spark a remarkable recovery in the ecological condition of the Churia forests in the three districts. The considerable financial potential of the forests is starting to be realised, thanks to the skills and dedication of local communities. Community forestry ensures that this potential will be utilised for the benefit of the direct forest users and for the region as a whole, while also helping to strengthen social ties within and between communities.

The successful adaptation of community forestry in the Terai and Churia highlights the flexibility inherent in the policy framework. The project has addressed problems unique to the region, such as the unequal distribution of forest resources from North to South and the complex relationships between diverse groups of forest users.

ChFDP is now ready to move into its next phase (2004-2007). With the continuing hard work and support of our partners in HMGN and NGOs, the project looks forward to further improvements in our strategy to build the forests of the Churia hills into an engine for development for all the people of the three target districts.

Project of the Ministry of Forest & Soil Conservation

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Driving each other nuts



Friends, Romans and countrymen, lend me your ears. I have come to you today with yet another column containing valuable driving tips. To those of you who are muttering under your breath, “Oh no, not another article with silly driving tips!” let me just say that you have no choice. Take it or leave it. What? You are turning the page to read the editorial? OK, bye.



Having valiantly survived the British siege at Nalapani and the two-year Indian blockade in 1989, we Nepalis have developed a siege mentality that will see us through this blockade too. After all, if we have been able to live without water for the last four months in our neighbourhood, there is no reason why we can't carry on without daily items of basic necessity like broccoli. But (just in case) make sure your car is tanked up with high octane kerosene from the Agni Petrol Station, so you can keep on driving around town with no worries at all.

I know, I know, we just did a motoring column, but in this day and age you can never have enough pointers on how to negotiate traffic on our streets and blockaded highways especially because the rules keep changing. So, without much ado about nothing, it is time for another periodic update with answers to frequently asked questions about

driving in Nepal:

Q: On which side of the road does one drive in Nepal?

A: Those of you who thought that in Nepal we drive on the left side of the road are wrong. That rule has just been changed, and all motorcycles are henceforth required to drive on the right side (which used to be the wrong side) of the street at all times and weave suicidally in and out dodging oncoming trucks and buses. The left side of the road will now only be used to park bricks, cement, steel rods and other construction material.

Q: What is the latest on helmets and visors?

A: As we go to press at 1900 hrs GMT on Thursday, you are not required to wear a helmet if you have a visor on. The pillion rider must have a helmet prominently displayed, but not necessarily on the head. The ban on visors has been reimposed after being lifted, and we are not quite sure of the status but you can wear an anti-pollution mask only if you can prove to the officer on duty that you are on a terrorist mission to blow up the toilet of Kathmandu's Ward 19 Secretariat.

Q: What are the rules on overtaking?

A: The first thing to remember is that we never overtake in Nepal, we always takeover. It is a part of our glorious culture to be territorial about a 10 m radius of asphalt around us on the street, and woe betide anyone who deigns to trespass this space. And that includes you over there, yes, you on the wheelchair with two children on the zebra crossing.

Q: Are there any specific things I need to know about military checkpoints?

A: I'm glad you asked that

question because I've been wondering myself why if bus passengers are brave enough to defy the blockade they still need to get off with all their belongings at a checkpoint in Mugling and walk one km to be body searched. And, oh yes, the next time you want to

go to the airport to receive someone, I suggest you go in on an armoured personnel carrier with a turret-mounted canon and blast your way through the sentry box. There is no other way to get to the arrival parking area to receive your near and dear ones.

Q: Besides chickens, are there any other things crossing the road that we need to watch out for?

A: Buffalos, goats, ducks and other livestock have right of way and can cross the road at any time anywhere and without warning. It is up to the driver behind the wheel to use telepathy to figure out what their intentions are. Dogs, on the other hand, don't cross the road but will race you while barking their heads off. Don't worry about them, unless they are wearing visors.