



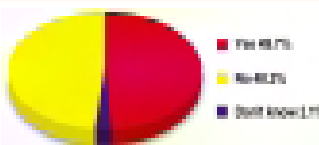
Maoists, too

Sidelined by the street agitation, Maoists leaders in a joint statement on Wednesday once more called for a joint movement with the parties against the monarchy. The leaders threatened action against those implicated in putting down the 1990 Movement, banned government vehicles from entering the capital for a month and declared another three-day banda 18-20 May.



nepalitimes.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 133

Q. Should King Gyanendra give in to the party's demand for parliament restoration?



Weekly Internet Poll # 134. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Does the anti-regression agitation by the parties have popular support?

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GAG

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Already battling on several fronts, the government of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa is now also coming under bitter attack from the media. Political tabloids aligned to the parties have always been critical, but now members of Nepal's private media have also joined in, not just to give wide coverage of the protests and write stinging anti-government editorials, but also to march in the streets.

This has set off a debate within the media itself about whether it compromises journalistic objectivity. The Federation of Nepali Journalists have called for a boycott beginning this Sunday of programs attended by the prime minister and his cabinet unless its five-point demand (which includes the resignation of powerful Information Minister Kamal Thapa) is met. For many, this is being too overtly partisan.

Stunned by the media backlash, the government has been backtracking somewhat, saying the manhandling and arrest of journalists last week could have been a case of "mistaken identity". In a statement on Monday, the prime minister said: "It wasn't deliberate or pre-planned,

sometimes it is difficult to say who is a journalist and who is a protester."

Indeed, the lines get blurred when journalists are on the streets to defy the government's anti-demo order in the capital. Last Friday, 70 journalists were rounded up and detained for a few hours.

"The arrests confirmed that the freedom of press is in real danger," says *Kantipur's* editor Narayan Wagle, who was arrested the following day at a media support rally. "We journalists must unite to support democracy."

FNJ chief Bishnu Nishturi agrees: "We are marching in support of democratic values that include a free press."

But there are some doubts about

The government is now also battling a hostile media

whether it is ethical for journalists to actually join the demonstrations they are covering. In a country where some papers are mouthpieces for political parties, this comes as no surprise. But should the mainstream press do it too? An FNJ member who did not want to be named told us: "Not all our members are professional, and some openly identify themselves as party cadre."

The involvement of the journalist unions was a big boost to the agitating parties. The demos have been headline news for three weeks, but now many mainstream media are also supporting the agitation in their editorials. Journalist-turned-politician Raghu

Panta of the UML sees no reason why journalists shouldn't be at the barricades. "If there is no democracy, there will be no free press. Journalists have the right to protest, they are citizens too."

One of Nepal's senior-most journalists and last year's Magsaysay-winner, Bharat Koirala thinks the line should be drawn somewhere: "If journalists are on the streets siding with political parties, that will be wrong. In fact it will compromise their credibility and ultimately hurt the profession. Our fight for freedom should be with the pen." ●

Editorial p2
A banana monarchy?

Peace Nepathya Tour 2004

Location	Date
Tulsipur, Dang	27th April, Tuesday
Dhangadi	29th April, Thursday
Nepalgunj	1st May, Saturday
Butwal	3rd May, Monday
Bhairahawa	4th May, Tuesday
Pokhara	6th May, Thursday
Tansen, Palpa	8th May, Saturday
Birgunj	10th May, Monday
Dharan	12th May, Wednesday
Dhulabari, Jhapa	14th May, Friday
Damak	16th May, Sunday
Janakpur	18th May, Tuesday
Hetauda	20th May, Thursday
Narayanghat	22nd May, Saturday
Kathmandu	28th and 29th May

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A BANANA MONARCHY?

Don't get us wrong. Despite everything, we still think it is better for Nepal to be a banana monarchy than a banana republic. At a recent forum on 'Media, Military and Monarchy' in Kathmandu, a noted newspaper editor from Thailand said he was shocked by the anti-monarchy protests and its coverage here.

When a monarchy becomes the subject of such sustained and intense criticism, it may be a sign that the country has outlived its need for one, he said. A monarchy is useful if it commands popular respect and authority so it can make discreet and selective interventions to ensure proper governance. But when such interventions lack legitimacy, or the monarch becomes a political player himself, both the king and his kingdom are in trouble.

King Gyanendra can't be seen to be calling the shots because he is supposed to be a constitutional monarch who has nominally transferred executive powers to the government he appointed. But no one really believes that. The Thapa administration exists at the monarch's will and pleasure.

It is up to the king, as a first step in unlocking this stalemate, to make the move to set up an inclusive interim government. And it is up to the parties to offer solutions instead of creating more street mayhem. The king could be looking for a way to roll back October Fourth without losing face. For the sake of the country, the parties have to give him that option. It may also come to a point where it is smarter to risk losing face than to let this drag on with all its unpredictable consequences.

Admission of a mismove can be easily made to look like a royal, statesmanlike effort to remove obstacles on the path to democratic renewal.

The street agitation is essentially friendly fire. Have they forgotten who the real enemy is? Are they trying to provoke a mass uprising, and play right into Maoist hands?

The Maoists have filled the vacuum left behind by the absence of the political parties at the grassroots and the absence of parliament at the centre. Each day that passes by without a representative government will only strengthen their revolution.

Democratic pluralism, with all its flaws, is the only bulwark against extremism and totalitarianism. It is the buffer the monarchy needs to return to its constitutional role. That is when the monarchy will again have continuity, be respected, and—like in Thailand—re-earn its role of being the final arbiter in times of deep national crisis.

A bideshi's view

The circle of events seems to be tightening

Monday afternoon I watched the choreographed dance between protesters and police along New Road. Red flags, fists raised, chanting slogans, protesters surged to the police lines. Then

GUEST COLUMN
Marcus Moench

the police would gather and the protesters, anticipating a charge, would ebb back. Soon all one could see were lines of helmets, the backs of those running before them and the yellow jackets of the press, cameras held high, following it all.

Those arrested were packed into police vans and trucks, still waving their flags and chanting. This is the ritual of arrest, a ritual that legitimates one's status as a true protester. For many bystanders, though, it is a spectator sport. Most shops adjacent to the demonstrations don't even bother to close. The protests in Kathmandu seem to lack the fire of conviction and direction. There is a sense of unreality as city life continues undisturbed aside from the predictable traffic jams. Trekking groups move out with regularity along the Everest national highway from Lukla to Base Camp. The Maoists collect taxes, incidents occur, people die, intellectuals (including myself)

debate causes, directions and likely outcomes. Although the circle of events seem to be tightening, even the best informed have little idea of where it will lead.

Structurally, however, many of the elements within Nepal and beyond that are likely to shape the future appear clear. Walking above Namche, the tempest in Kathmandu seemed far

removed from local realities. All evidence of the political parties seems to have been erased. No posters, signs and party offices. Porters, guides and lodge owners laugh and make dismissive comments when asked about the parties and their demands for reinstatement of parliament. The status of the monarchy doesn't fare much better. Neither of the pillars of Nepal's formal political system has much legitimacy in the eyes of rural Nepalis.

While the leaders struggle for power in faraway Kathmandu, the bureaucracy decays. In 20 days on the trail and climbing, no one ever asked for the permit we purchased to climb Island Peak.

In the vacuum, the Maoists, to use their analogy, swim like fish in the ocean. It may be a more friendly ocean than many in Kathmandu would like to think. Years of ineffective development has generated tremendous rural anger. In the Khumbu, the tax collectors sent by the Maoists are often Sherpas, a wealthy community logically opposed to the Maoist ideology.

The king and the army move where they like and even hold large public meetings. Like a man stepping into a shallow pond, however, they can't stop the water from flowing back once their foot is lifted.

The Maoists probably see a



KIRAN PANDAY

LETTERS

MANJUSHREE

I was saddened to see the photos of the injured writer Manjushree Thapa ('A marcher of history' #191) in your paper and would like to join others in wishing her a speedy recovery and condemning the ruthless behavior of the policeman that reduced her to that state. But I would also like her to help dispel some doubts I have about the 'anti-regression' movement. How can she join people like GP Koirala, one of those responsible for giving democracy a bad name and allowing Operation Romeo and Kilo Sierra 2 that delivered the people of the western districts into the hands of the Maoists, a man who reduced the Nepali Congress to his personal



fiefdom? How can she follow MK Nepal, a leader of a party with doubtful democratic roots, who conducted his opposition to past democratically elected governments with the weapon of bandas and holding Nepalis hostage, and has tried several times to strike a deal with the Maoists? Would these people suddenly become honest and promote good governance in a republican system? The French Revolution, invoked by so many of Manjushreeji's 'intellectual' friends (including the sermon writer CK Lal) as an example to follow, took place over two centuries ago and ended badly. Humanity has progressed, we devised liberal democracy based on something called the rule of law that does not need to use the guillotine, barricades, stone throwing and torching of vehicles to check the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few. One can understand Koirala and his cronies when they protest in the streets in the name of that same democracy they violated. After all, they don't want to relinquish power and are professional hypocrites. One is surprised to find people like Manjushree doing the same.

If she and her 'intellectual' friends would, for once, come out

of their elitist bubble and go among the common people, they will find that support for the king and dissatisfaction towards the political parties is widespread, not limited to few mandales as CK Lal in the same issue wants us to believe. In any nation, such a situation would provoke self-criticism and a change of leadership in the parties, but not in Nepal where intellectual arrogance, confusion or maybe even stupidity reigns supreme. Think of those 'academics' that theorise about the 'links' between the Maoists and the king. Don't you see that the only real danger for the freedom and development of our country is the Maoist movement? Manjushree, don't you think is time to stop being obsessed with the past and try instead to work together, yes, also with the king for a better future?

Suraj K Aryal, email

● I am amused at the media, including *Nepali Times*, giving so much attention to Manjushree Thapa being beaten by police during a demonstration. Is it because she is the daughter of Bekh Bahadur Thapa, or a writer with many friends in media, or both? There are hundreds being killed by the RNA and the Maoists: they are the many unknown faces, theirs are

the untold stories.

Sandhya Sharma, USA

FIGHTING UPRISINGS

The blurb 'How long can King Gyanendra afford to fight two uprisings?' in the article by Navin Singh Khadga ('No looking back', #191) is crooked. It should have read 'How long can Nepalis afford to fight two uprisings?' A day will soon come when by-standers, shopkeepers, passersby will start stoning the politicians. They are making a mockery of democracy.

Om Rajbhandary, Kathmandu

SEX ECONOMY

After reading Naresh Newar's 'Selling sex to survive' (# 190), I have a very practical (albeit unoriginal) idea: legalise and regulate the flesh trade. In France and the Netherlands, prostitution is legal and well regulated with sex workers being represented by their own trade unions (they even go on strikes). In Thailand, the industry fetches over 15 percent of the country's foreign income and the government not only provides support but also promotes the trade as one of their best tourist attractions. Does that not tell us something? As Newar points out, prostitution can't be eradicated because everyone

from politicians, writers and journalists to the policeman, soldier and civilian use this service. Why do we have to be hypocritical about the oldest profession in the world? Legalising it would increase government revenue instead of lining the pockets of corrupt officials. It would control AIDS, Hepatitis-B and other STDs and would mean more jobs that in turn would mean more stability and security for the country.

Name withheld on request, email

BAITADI

Many thanks to Kishore Nepal for his report on the displaced people of my native district of Baitadi ('Nothing left to lose', #191). Although I am far away from Nepal at present, I can imagine how Maoist brutality and harassment by the security forces is affecting locals. Going home last year, I experienced how the security detail near Dadeldhura army barrack treated ordinary Nepalis. May 2061 brings peace to our motherland.

Laxmi Bhatta, Singapore

NEPALI MOVIES

Ashutosh Tiwari in 'Lights, camera, zzzz' (Strictly Business, #192) completely fails to understand the

strategic opportunity this year. The international community is distracted by Iraq. Funds and guidance, yes. Direct intervention, unlikely. The monarchy and the political parties are distracted by each other within the ever-narrowing circle of Kathmandu's Ring Road.

India appears increasingly concerned by reported links with its own Maoists and separatists. Pressure to take effective action is likely to grow following the current elections. But what type of action?

For the Maoists, the situation represents a window of opportunity. Outright victory against an organised army is doubtful, but they could shape the terms of peace once a unified counterpart to negotiate with emerges in Kathmandu. They have a strong incentive to keep up the pressure.

Where does all this leave democracy and democratic processes? Whatever the timing and context, at some point the situation will reach a critical juncture and change will occur. A time of choice will come, elections will probably be held, the constitution may be rewritten, political entities and the bureaucracy are likely to re-emerge in rural areas.

There seems to be little debate or awareness, however, of democratic alternatives and how governance structures influence true representation and the ability of a state to actually deliver development services. For those hoping to give Nepal a better future, this is one of the most important challenges. ●

Marcus Moench is the director of the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition.

Let them eat cake

It is still not too late to acknowledge that October Fourth was a blunder

We have come a long way since the late 1980s on nearly all development parameters. Average life expectancy has gone up, infant mortality has dropped, literacy

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



levels have climbed up and poverty in the countryside has decreased. Guess what, it all happened during the decade that the country was democratic.

People in Jumla and Kalikot complain about the price of food grains and the unavailability of salt, and there is a serious danger of the gains since 1990 being wiped out because of the Maoist blockades and conflict which is now claiming an average of 12 Nepali lives everyday, but monsoon-dependent subsistence agriculture survives. Remittance from abroad, mainly India, is keeping the economy afloat. While wrenching hunger is becoming common, actual cases of starvation are rare.

Nobel-laureate Amartya Sen's seminal formulation about famines being less catastrophic under democratic regimes is true for all times and in all countries. Once hunger is overcome, most of us want to live a life of dignity. Given a choice between serfdom with bread and hunger with honour,

there is very little doubt what most of us would choose. But sections of the Nepali elite don't really worry about freedoms as long as they can have their cakes and eat them too. When the traditional Tharu homeland in the inner tarai was displaced to resettle royal favourites, some of King Mahendra's loyal subjects lost faith in his divinity. King Birendra's penchant for creating competitive urban nodes in the hills to balance the market towns of tarai never took off—Surkhet is still stagnating while Nepalganj bears a boomtown look. It wasted enormous human and material resources that could have been otherwise used for the development of more suitable spaces. King Gyanendra willed recently that Nepalganj should now be shifted back to Surkhet.

Einstein had uncharitable things to say about those who keep doing the same thing over and over again in the hope that next time it will give a different result. Perhaps the people prompting King Gyanendra to remain CEO of Nepal Inc should

be reminded of this. King Mahendra set out to achieve in 10 years what others had taken centuries to do, and failed. King Birendra's dreams of taking Nepal to 'Asian standards' bombed badly. Both rulers relied on the cakes-without-liberty class of Kathmandu aparthiks who just passed on the blame for those two failures to the kings they served.

Democracy isn't just an ideal system, it is the only mechanism that works for the poor and marginalised. Despite corruption, chronic instability and widespread nepotism, democracy since 1990 had begun to deliver services where it was needed most. It was starting to change the balance of power and making leaders accountable. Given time, democracy's in-built self-correcting mechanisms would have made it work it better. Unfortunately, King Gyanendra wasn't prepared to wait.

It's simple, really. A hereditary head of state just can't be anything more than a symbolic figure in this day and age. A king can't also be chief executive. Even Lee Kuan



KIRAN PANDAY

Yew needed legitimacy that he had to earn by demonstrating accountability. There is no alternative to the restoration of sovereignty of the people. There never was, and it is getting late to acknowledge that October Fourth was a monumental blunder. The sooner this crisis of confidence between the king and the mainstream parties is resolved, the better it will be for both. And for the Nepali people. ●

background, context and audience of the Nepali movie industry by saying that they admit to being 'ashamed of being Nepali cinema artists. I have heard some artists' dissatisfaction with the Nepali movie industry's lack of a solid market and insufficient pay thereof, which have led them to seek other fulltime professions in order to maintain their livelihoods. I think they have every right to be disgruntled in that regard as long as we, the educated, English-speaking urban hipsters are unwilling to appreciate our own products over Hollywood and Bollywood fare. He then goes on to say that Nepali music videos are far superior to Nepali movies. Maybe he is focusing only on the cute, young models with awkward looks on their face as they catwalk on the sidewalks. They may be entertaining, but they are not 'better, slicker, bolder, more creative or technically sophisticated.' Contrary to Tiwari's assertions, people calling the shots in the movie industry are not all 'from the older generation with fixed views...' In fact, some have lived for a long time in the most developed and liberal societies in the world. The reason 'Nepali

movies remain and will remain dull and boring' to people like Tiwari is because they are not made for English-speaking Kathmandu urbanites. The rest of Nepal loves them.

Kedar Koirala, email

TIMES

Some comments about *Nepali Times*. Firstly, the internet polls in your newspaper don't really represent the general public. I am not suggesting any dishonesty on your part, but perhaps the voters are the same every week, and number too few to come up with a representational statistic. Being a leading newspaper, this could send the wrong message to readers—remember the article by Baburam Bhattarai where he thanked the public for supporting the Maoists based on your poll? Secondly, humour is a wonderful thing, but it has its place. No one wants to pick up the paper and read pages of gloom, but Kunda Dixit's column, as much as I admire his wit, has started to feel out of place. It's time a journalist of such high standing took a more responsible role. And for god's sake, the golf column is ridiculously out of place in a country like Nepal.

Pradeep Singh, email

SINNERS IN HEAVEN

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New hope for thousands as the National Kidney Centre offers affordable dialysis in Nepal

Staying alive



ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

NARESH NEWAR

Former British Gurkha soldier KS Limbu is fighting the hardest battle of his life at age 70. With both kidneys damaged, this war veteran has spent nearly all his savings to stay alive. Lying down on the narrow hospital bed at the National Kidney Centre (NKC), Limbu's life depends on a dialysis

machine. When the kidney is damaged, toxins build up in the blood and the only way to prevent further kidney failure is dialysis. Two needles are injected into blood vessels of the wrist and are attached to a dialysis machine. The machine purifies the blood from the patient before pumping it back into the body.

Since kidney transplants are unavailable in Nepal, the only way

to stay alive is through excruciating four-hour dialysis sessions twice a week. Transplants in India cost up to Rs 500,000 but even then patients need follow up care at kidney care centres and have to take medications all their lives. The other option, dialysis, doesn't come cheap either. At Rs 30,000 every month, it is out of reach for most patients. "My children support me, but soon I'll have

to take a loan because we are all running out of cash," says Limbu weakly. But even so, Limbu is lucky. He pays considerably less for his life-saving procedure at NKC than at other private health clinics.

While the centre is making serious efforts to subsidise the treatment, it does not give it for free. "Once we start doing that, we will have to close," says Rishi Kafle, chief

nephrologist at NKC, which is run by the non-profit Health Care Foundation-Nepal (HECAF) in Naxal. Till a few years ago, most Nepali kidney patients either went to India or waited for months at Bir Hospital. Running a private dialysis facility was unthinkable. Dialysis machines cost Rs 1.5 million each and need expert maintenance. The NKC only manages because it teamed up with a German social worker, Beate Vogt.

When she was in the United States, Vogt met a Nepali kidney patient who told her there was no dialysis centre in Nepal. Vogt's mission became to roam from one German hospital to another, begging them to donate old dialysis machines. She hired technicians to repair them and ship them to Nepal. The NKC was established in 1997 with Vogt as its honorary advisor. Today, the NKC is the nation's best-equipped kidney care centre, and carried out 700 dialysis sessions in the first year. Now, with 15 dialysis machines, it carries out over 650 sessions every month.

Pawan Ghimire has been coming to the NKC with his 66-year-old mother who has suffered from kidney failure for the past six years. He used to take her to India but having her treated here has become more economical. Still, it's difficult for him to foot the bill every month, even on a good salary. "It's expensive for us but the doctors here are

Life under Bush

It's election year and the book's being thrown at Dubya

To say the current US government is controversial is to grossly understate the facts. Opinion polls show Americans sharply divided on their president and his team. It's almost 50-50 among those who've made up their minds on George W Bush. You either love him or hate him.

Since I arrived in the United States two months ago, I've met people from both those camps and absolutely no one who sits

HERE AND THERE

Daniel Lak



on the fence. So if the words of a *Nepali Times* columnist occasionally seem anti-American, let it be known that my criticism of Washington are mild compared to what anti-Bush forces are saying here. Consider the books that are being churned out by the dozen as election fever takes hold and Americans get set to decide Bush's political fate this coming November. At the moment, I'm reading *Fraud: The Strategy Behind The Bush Lies And Why The Media Didn't Tell You* by Paul Waldman.

From the very first line in the opening chapter, Waldman gets the gloves off. 'The unfortunate truth is this,' he writes, 'George Bush is a fraud.' This is an American speaking, not an Iraqi Baathist or Osama Bin Laden's spokesman. The author goes on to

explain that President Bush's persona as an inarticulate, but honest ordinary guy is a carefully cultivated fraud designed to dupe in the voters into ignoring his upbringing as a person of privilege, son of a former president, grandson of a United States Senator, a millionaire among millionaires. Waldman points out that Bush has never known economic want or uncertainty, wondered about paying the bills on time or gone hungry because of penny-pinching. There was always family money to bail him

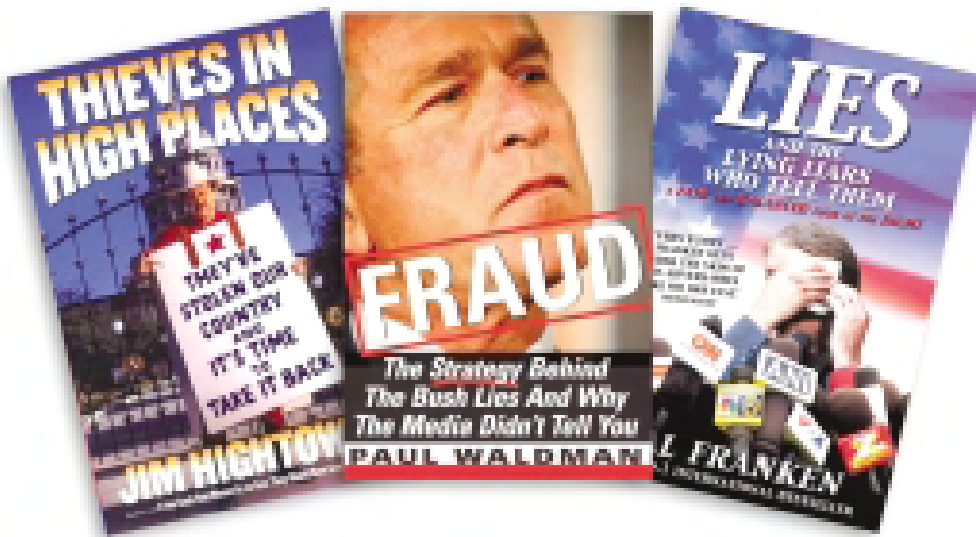
out of trouble, and that happened several times. So if the president's economic policies seem to be ignoring the poor and running the country's finances into the ground, it's only natural. Or so writes Paul Waldman.

Then there's comedian Al Franken's contribution to the groaning shelf of anti-Bush books. This one leaves no doubt about its intent from the title onwards. *Lies and the Lying Liars who tell them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*. It's an

attack on the Bush administration and its many supporters in the media. This book is by a comedian and it's funny. But it's also disturbing because it argues that the current strand of dominant political thinking in America cares not a whit for truth or decency, only power and how to maintain it.

Bush critiques crowd the left end of the bookshelf too. *Thieves in High Places*, *The Big Lie*, *how the Right Wing Propaganda Machine Distorts the Truth*, *Stupid White Men*, *Bushwhacked*, *Life in George W Bush's America*, *Losing Our Way in the New Century*, *Dude, Where's My Country?* and *American Dynasty*, *Aristocracy*, *Fortune and the politics of deceit in the House of Bush* are all intensely anti-Bush, and I dare say, if written by a foreigner, they'd be considered anti-American. I can't recall a president who inspires such visceral feelings among his critics. Even Ronald Reagan, seen by opponents as slightly dim and too right wing, didn't have such enemies. And as for George W's supporters, the less said the better. But Ann Coulter, an author and defender of Bush, entitles her most recent book *Treason, Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terror*.

On the matter of President Bush, these States are far from United. ●



reasonable,” he says. “When I don’t have money, they consider my position.” Although NKC refuses free dialysis, it does offer free sessions to regular patients who run out money and are compelled to stop. “It is difficult for us to watch someone quit, and the patient suffers,” says Kafle.

Things are not easy with high operational costs: daily tanks of pure water, rent and huge electricity bills, medical supplies and salaries for the 60 hospital staff. “Fortunately, Beate helps us with the technicians and sends us machines and spare parts,” says Kafle. “We also owe much to the Nepali patients because they trusted us and without them, we would not be able to run so smoothly.” Every year, 2,000 new kidney patients are added in Nepal. Several private nursing homes have either stopped dialysis treatment or reduced the number of sessions because of high overheads. Even in India, the renowned Sai Baba Hospital—where most Nepalis used to go for kidney treatment—has closed. New Delhi’s Apollo Hospital, one of South Asia’s largest medical facilities, has only 18 machines.

This makes the service NKC provides much more critical. It plans to branch out to Pokhara and Nepalganj to cover the west and far-western regions where there is no dialysis service. The centre has also set up an isolated unit in Naxal for



(Clockwise, l-r) Patient in the isolated unit at National Kidney Centre, 70-year-old KS Limbu undergoing dialysis Patients line up at the National Kidney Centre for their turns at the dialysis machine.



HIV and Hepatitis patients with kidney problems. Since they are perceived to put other patients at risk, most hospitals are reluctant to accept them. A 25-year-old army officer under treatment at the army hospital was transferred to this centre

after he was infected with Hepatitis C while being treated for kidney failure. “This unit has made it safe for these kinds of patients because we have separate machines for them,” says the centre’s doctor, Salil Poudyal. ●

Rais in the Rockies

ELLEN WINNER in BOULDER

The Colorado Rai community are organising this year’s Rai-Kirat *Sakewa Sili* festival in Boulder’s courthouse lawn on 8 May. Hundreds of people, including Rai-Kirats from all over the United States, are expected to attend. The traditional ceremonies honor the ancestors, reaffirm the people’s connection with nature and the spirits of the land and water, pray for continued fertility, and give thanks. “There are so many beautiful things about our Rai-Kirat tradition,” says Vim Rai, “we want our friends from other cultures to know who we are. In the spirit of peace and friendship.” Tibetans, Sherpas, Newars, other Nepali groups, and even South Indian dancers who live in Colorado’s Rocky Mountains will also join in the celebration with performances in their own cultural traditions. This year’s *Sakewa* promises a truly delightful experience, featuring as its highlight a performance of the traditional Rai-Kirat *Sakewa Sili*, a joyful line dance led by a *sili mangpa* (dance leader) in which everyone is invited to join. *Sakewa Sili* is a prayer in motion. Using simple, expressive movements, the dancers act out the Rai-Kirat legend of how their gods gave them the wisdom to transform themselves from hunter-gatherers to farmers and plant the first rice. Dancers weave around a lingam symbolizing fertility, evoking the clearing of the forest,

digging of the soil, planting, transplanting, and harvesting. Flying motions represent spring birds flying north, ushering in the planting season and giving the festival its name: *Ubhauli*. Traditional cultural artifacts such as *khurbas* (sickles), *dhyangros* (long-handled two-sided drums), *dokos* (baskets), and *binayos* (bamboo mouth harps) used in the Himalayan villages of the old Rai-Kirat tribes will be on display, a bazaar will feature Himalayan goods, and a food booth will offer Nepali dishes such as *dhalbhat tarkari*, chicken curry, and iced *chiya*. Proceeds from food sales will be used to offset costs of producing the event. Vim Rai let me tag along on a trek to Dangmaya in the Arun Valley in 1990 where I met Rai shamans. One night, watching my shaman guru perform a version of the *Sakewa Sili* dance, I suddenly “got it”. Through the dance, I could feel the safety and belonging of the Rai-Kirat’s connection with the ever-renewing rice crop, the forest, and the cycles of nature that nourish them. So different from western culture where we live on petroleum resources with the uneasy knowledge that it can’t last. The Rai-Kirats have much to teach us. ●

Ellen winner studied Rai-Kirat shamanism at Mohan Rai’s Shamanistic Studies and Research Centre and is the author of *World Shaman*, and *Thoughts in the Mind of God*



DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Remittance economies

Remittances, Nepal’s main source of income, have increased and are propping up South Asian economies. A World Bank report says the region received \$18.2 billion last year, up from \$13.1 in 2002. The report, ‘Global Development Finance 2004’, found India remained the second largest recipient of remittances worldwide with \$8.4 billion. In Pakistan, receipts from remittances tripled between 2001 and 2003 while the figure doubled in Bangladesh during the same period. Nepal hasn’t been taken into account, but estimates show the country earns Rs 1 billion annually from its overseas workers. The Bank has forecast that South Asia’s GDP will grow 7.2 percent in 2004. “IT exports from India, new regional trade initiatives, improved relations between Indian and Pakistan, and continued reforms will contribute to the region’s achieving this record growth next year,” it says.

Missing

British tourist Gareth Koch, 24, has been missing for nearly a month in Nepal after leaving for a trek to the Sagarmatha area. He was due to return home on 20 March but failed to do so or call to inform his concerned parents about a delay in plans. A friend who accompanied Koch till Lukla has returned to the UK safely. Koch is a 5ft 9in Caucasian with light brown short hair and an appendix scar. Any information on Koch’s whereabouts can be reported to the British Embassy, 4410583.



Marathon update

The bad news first: the Lumbini International Marathon, originally slated for 3 May, has been postponed indefinitely due to security concerns and the overall situation in Nepal. But there’s no need to pack away those running shoes just yet. The annual Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon will take place as usual on 29 May, the day the mountaineering duo made their historic ascent. Many foreign and Nepali runners have already registered, and acclimatisation and trekking for foreign runners begins 15 May.

Bottling it up

Who would’ve thought that clean plastic waste, such as mineral water bottles, can be used as a thermal insulator in buildings? The bottles are packed in bags and in the ceiling or within cavity walls to keep a house warm in winter and cool in summer. Air is an effective insulator and once it fill the bottles, circulation stops within the walls. A house built with these bottles inside the cavity wall can provide excellent insulation and help to improve comfort and reduce heating expenses. At present a house at Kitini in Godavari is being built using this environment-friendly, cheap and easy technology. (Sjoerd Nienhuys)





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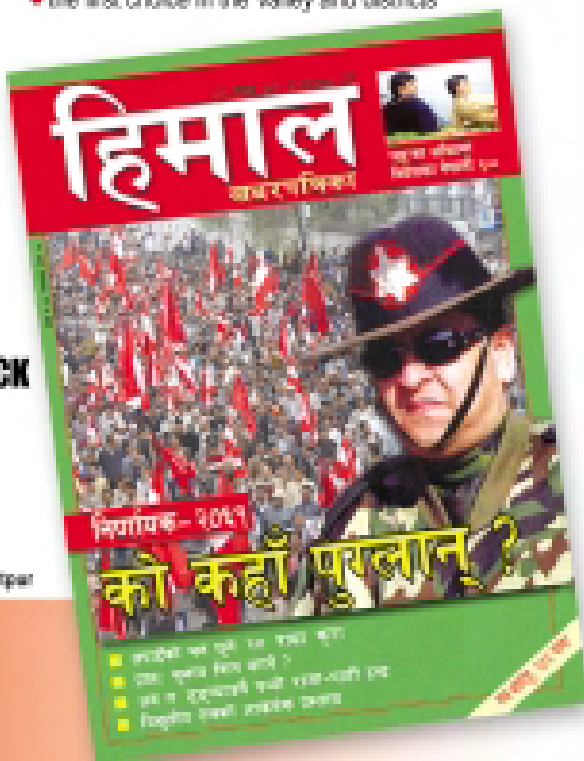
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Networking for Nepal

Stop complaining, and start helping Nepal

Raju Adhikari is a scientist in Australia, Shailesh Gongol is an airport planner in America, Pranab Gyawali is a doctor in Britain, Arun Singh Basnet is a philanthropist in Nepal, Upendra Mahto is a successful businessman in Belarus, Suman Dhakal is a quality controller in a factory in Italy, Himali Upadhyaya is an international banker in Austria, Mahesh KC is an engineer in Sweden, Madan Gautam is a conservationist in New Zealand and Gokul Bhandari is a PhD scholar in Canada.

These global Nepalis all have one thing in common: a strong conviction that every Nepali *must* do something for Nepal. Otherwise, they say, there is no point just sitting and complaining about the country. To translate that conviction into action, they work with scores of other like-minded

LONDON EYE

Rabindra Mishra



Nepalis in a charity called Help Nepal Network (HeNN) with formally registered chapters in Nepal, the US, the UK and Australia and informal chapters in six other countries.

The network draws its inspiration from late Gopal Yonjan's powerful patriotic lyrics, 'Dherai chha garnu swadeshko sewa, Nepali bannalai/Shir thado pari Nepali bhanne ma nai hun bhannalai/Hoina bhane Nepali nabhana, birko chhora, naatima nagana,' which has an audio-link on the charity's website, www.helpnepal.net.

Nepalis returning from a holiday in Nepal would share experiences about how things were getting worse everyday. Over pints of beer, they analysed why this was so. But if someone asked what they had done to make things better, the answer was usually "nothing". HeNN changed that when it was set up four years ago. It aimed to encourage Nepalis, especially those living abroad, to contribute to Nepal.



The network urges every earning member of the non-residential Nepali community to forego a can of beer or carton of juice every month and donate the savings to the fund. In Nepal, it urges locals to have a plate of momo or a few cups of tea less for the same purpose.

HeNN-UK's Madhusudan Kayastha, says: "We expect more and more Nepalis to contribute actively to nation-building through any small way." The appeal has worked. In the last four years, the network has raised nearly \$50,000, virtually all from Nepalis. But it also accepts donations from non-Nepalis. The America-Nepal Alliance for Health, through the initiative of its president, Jack Starmer, donated \$1,000 to buy medical equipment for a \$8,000 health post in a remote village at Mugu.

So far, HeNN has supported the construction of a library in Dolpa and schools in Pyuthan, Dang and Parbat. It has conducted several health camps and, in collaboration with Nepalganj-based Sahara Group, supported children affected by recent violence in the country. It also helped Khotang's flood victims in 2002.

One of HeNN's strengths is that all the money is used for projects, there are no overheads. Until the end of last year, administrative costs were born by volunteer committee members but as activities expanded, it became more difficult to manage finances. This year HeNN opened a small office in Kathmandu. Its running cost is sponsored by two Nepali businessmen: Ashok Shrestha in the UK and Upendra Mahato in Belarus. The money, therefore, remains exclusively for charity.

HeNN has learnt that it does not take millions to make a difference, it just takes a desire to help, a dollar or a few rupees. The important part is a collection mechanism, and managing and using individual donations. This is what HeNN tries to deliver. "Just imagine how many schools, health posts, orphanages and old people's homes overseas Nepalis can build and support if they donated just a dollar a month to a collective fund," says HeNN-Nepal president Arun Singh Basnet. "This is what our dream is all about."

Rabindra Mishra has been associated with Help Nepal Network from its inception. Donations: admin@helpnepal.net www.helpnepal.net

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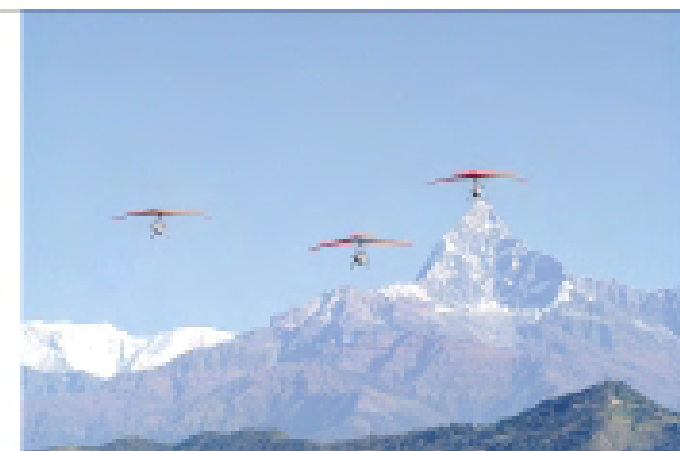
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MIN BAJRACHARYA

DEWAN RAI

Nepali handknotted woollen carpets are valued for their unique texture and colour, resiliency, strength and durability. Made from refined pure wool dyed both with vegetable and chemical dyes these carpets have an international cache that makes them the second largest Nepali export.

The carpet industry has another important function. The factories, usually on the outskirts of major urban centres, absorb many unskilled rural immigrants. A decade ago, nearly 300,000 people were employed spinning woollen yarn. But most of them have now been replaced with machines. Gopinath Majhi, chairperson of the Woollen Yarn Labour Union, believes only about 60,000 still have their jobs. "It is difficult to earn a living spinning wool these days," he says.

Up against the perfect yarn produced by machines, workers are under pressure to churn out similar results. This, Majhi says, has felled productivity from 5kg to around 3kg of super 60-knot yarn a day, for which the worker is paid between Rs 20-28 per kg. A machine, on the other hand, can spin almost 1,000 kg of the same wool a day, replacing

the work of almost 500 labourers. "If we can stop using machines, about 200,000 jobs will be created immediately," claims Majhi.

The debate over machine-spun yarn for carpets has raged for almost a decade. The principal beneficiaries are carpet factory owners who profit by slashing production costs and then selling their products at the price of handspun woollen carpet. Despite present laws forbidding the use of machine-spun wool for carpets, it is a common practice. During our three hours at a yarn shop, two suppliers and three phone enquires came for machine spun yarn.

Mills are allowed to spin yarn below 30 microns, officially intended only for woollen knitwear. However, these mills supply yarn for carpets as well, which should use wool above 30 microns. "We produce thread according to the buyers' demands," says Dinesh Khetan of Amulet Wool Industry. "It is not our concern if our clients use it in carpets, sweaters or dump it elsewhere."

Handspun yarn entrepreneurs filed a complaint in 1998 demanding immediate action to stop the illegal operation of mechanised mills, but this has had little impact. They believe Nepal has

a niche market because of fine handwoven craftsmanship. Instead of trying to compete with rock-bottom prices of machine-made carpets, they say we should protect and promote our carpets as traditional and completely handmade.

"We can not wait in business," says Deepak Kumar Bhattarai, owner of Paramount Carpet Industry, one of Nepal's biggest carpet exporters. "We have to meet the client's demands and it doesn't make sense to stick to handspun wool." He says his company uses only handspun woollen yarn, but admits that machines can increase production and make Nepali carpets more competitive in the international market. Even so, others blame machine-spun yarn for the drop in carpet exports. The handmade carpet industry exports peaked in 1993/94 with over 3.3 million sq m of carpets worth Rs 9.5 billion. Gradually things went downhill. By 2003, exports were down to 1.6 million sq m. Bhattarai doesn't think the drop is entirely because of entrepreneurial weakness or even government policy. "It is due to declining global consumption of carpets," he said. He also holds Indian exporters responsible for undercutting the Nepali market by

Machine-spun wool in carpets is not only illegal, it is also taking jobs away and raising questions about quality

hiring Nepali craftsmen to imitate Nepali handknotted products.

Gehendra Bahadur Bajracharya, executive director of the Wool and Carpet Development Board, thinks global economic recession and a change in consumer demands are also responsible for the slump. "The new generations prefer fashionable and perishable items to lasting heirlooms," he says.

Priorities have changed and the European market that the Nepali carpet industry relies on so heavily has become intensely competitive. The fall in quality doesn't help. Two years ago, Belgium's Benelux Orient Company, one of the 10 largest buyers of Nepali carpets in Europe, wrote to the Nepali embassy about low quality and fake carpets from Nepal. The government circulated the letter to carpet exporters but nothing was done.

Without the distinction of being high quality, handmade products, Nepali carpets don't stand a chance against cheaper, machine-made ones from India and China. A lack of creativity to keep up with changing tastes could be another reason for the downturn. However, carpet entrepreneurs believe machine-made thread is the biggest threat to the Nepali carpet industry.

The Wool and Carpet

Development Board, established in 1992, has control over the General Special Preference (GSP) licenses that industries need to export. Ideally, this board should monitor quality and stop carpets using machine-spun yarn. Unfortunately, the GSP certificates are distributed solely on the basis of a self-declaration made by the stakeholder as the board has no testing lab or verification tools. With just two inspectors who make occasional factory visits, only shipments woven on machines are stopped. Machine-woven thread is a neglected concern.

Handspun yarn entrepreneurs claim that over 50 percent of carpets are currently made with machine-spun yarn, but Bajracharya is sceptical. Komal Prasad Palikhe, planning section director at the Department of Cottage and Small Scale Industry, says they have been working on this problem for more than five years. "We took action against many industries but there were no results," he says. "We have limited resources, how is it possible to check every industry?" Bhattarai thinks all this is a non-issue: "There is a conflict of interest between entrepreneurs. The main concern must be how to increase exports, raise the economy and create more jobs." ● KPK

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Weeklies galore

Three new weekly magazines have hit the stands, but is the Nepali market large enough for all of them?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Bad news seems to be good news: in the past week there has been a flashflood of slick new weekly magazines hitting the stands.

Kantipur Publication's *Nepal* pre-empted the launch of its former group editor Yubaraj Ghimire's *Samaya* by going weekly last month. *Samaya* itself came out this week. In English, the news stands have seen the advent of yet another weekly magazine, *Nation*.

All three new contenders are aiming at the mainstream middle class market in English and Nepali, hoping that better printing quality and upgraded news content will draw advertisers. Media analysts see *Nepal* and *Samaya* jostling for the same readership, while *Nation* takes on 12-year-old English *Spotlight*.

The weekly market is now going to be crowded as established political tabloids like *Drishti* and *Bimarsha* have spruced up and gone through major layout revamps. Registration records at the Information Department show that 1,300 of the 3,700 licensed publications in the country are weeklies. Not all of them are publishing, and the circulation battle is going to be between the two new entrants and the tabloids.

At a time when there are so many dailies, is there really a need for weekly newsmagazines in Nepali? Yubaraj Ghimire, who edited *The Kathmandu Post* and *Kantipur* before starting *Samaya* says there were aberrations in the dailies that ignored corruption and diverted attention from real issues. "This is the space that weeklies can fill and demonstrate professionalism,

accountability and credibility," he told us.

With so much going on, it seems the weeklies have their work cut out to deliver what they promise. "This is where we fit in," explains *Nepal*'s editor Sudhir Sharma. "Our niche will be news reports, features, analyses and investigative pieces."

Ghimire reckons the reading population is getting

more sophisticated and expects greater professionalism and quality from magazines. "Our professional ability and capability will be tested," he adds. Sharma thinks the shift from fortnightly to weekly will be seamless. "We are already very well established and have a headstart," he says.

Samaya is brought out by Bhrikuti Publications which has travel entrepreneur Bharat

Basnet as its chairman, while *Nation* is published by Mirror Media.

Until recently, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, which is published by Himalmedia (also the publishers of *Nepali Times*), and *Nepal* were the two mainstream fortnightlies. Himalmedia has decided to keep its *Himal Khabarpatrika* a fortnightly. General Manager Anil Shrestha explains: "We had

a serious business plan for a weekly two years ago, but concluded that it wasn't the right time to increase frequency with a sluggish economy and transportation problems."

The new English language weekly will face the same problem of a crowded market as the Nepali ones, but even more acutely because of the limited readership in English. The *Nation*'s editor Akhilesh Upadhyay, however, is not too concerned: "Good journalism is good business, and it is here to stay."

One question that nags those in the media industry is how sustainable the new publications will be since the advertising pie is not growing. "Even if the rise in the frequency and number is good news for readers," says media analyst P Kharel, "it is intriguing that even when it looks certain they will lose money, more publications are joining the fray."

The conflict and political instability has brought the economy to its knees, and everyone, including the advertising industry, is hunkering down for the long haul. Joydeb Chakravarty of Thompson Nepal doesn't see how all the new publications can survive. "There will be a shakeout sooner or later because advertising budgets are not increasing at all," he says.

Till then at least, Nepali readers can enjoy greater choice, better quality journalism and the hope that increased competition will bring down prices like it has with the dailies. ●



WEEKLY EDITORS (from l-r): Sudhir Sharma, Akhilesh Upadhyay and Yubaraj Ghimire.

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BIZ

NEWS

Merger

Nepal Rastra Bank recently approved the merger of Birganj-based Laxmi Bank and the prominent Hisef Finance Company. The new entity will operate as Laxmi Bank Limited, with a paid capital of Rs 610 million. Existing Hisef employees and the Hattisar office were absorbed by Laxmi Bank, which will be headed by CEO Suman Joshi. Laxmi Bank has already emerged as a key player in consumer finance, with pioneering efforts in incorporating IT into the Nepali banking world. Future plans include ATM and debit cards, and a branch in Pokhara.

PATA honour

Rabendra Raj Pandey, executive chairman of Everest Express Travels and Tours, has become the second Nepali to be awarded the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) life membership, the travel group's highest individual honour. His dedication and leadership, with 23 years at PATA and in the Nepali tourism industry, has been commended before with the 1999 PATA Award of Merit and the PATA Chairman's Award in 2000 and 2002.

Busy skies

Your waiting-list woes may be over: Air Sahara, a private Indian airline, will be operating daily Delhi-Kathmandu flights starting 12 May. With a fleet that includes new generation Boeing 737-700s, 737-800s and classic Boeing 37-400 and three CRJ-200s, the future may well see Air Sahara flights from other Indian cities to Nepal as well. It looks like Nepali and regional tourism are both in for a big boost, as another private Indian airline, Jet Airways, is also set to start flights into Kathmandu in the near future.

All things IT

The British Council will be holding its annual Cyber Fair from 10AM-4PM on 25 April at the Lainchaur office. It's all about IT, with everything from free internet browsing to an IT-related quiz, a series of IT presentations and opportunities to browse through the latest IT reference books or find out about IT learning opportunities in the UK. The fair, which is open to all with free admission, will also launch of the British Council's redesigned website.

NEW PRODUCTS

BMW GOES COMPACT: This autumn will see BMW's first compact class car go on sale. With typical BMW characteristics including rear wheel drive, powerful engines, front kidney grille and double headlamps, the BMW 1 Series will also feature five door entry, a low roof line and variable storage space. The well-arranged cockpit is ideal for long journeys and city trips, and the layout enables the best possible axle load distribution, engine power transfer and traction. You can kiss your safety worries goodbye with the BMW 1 Series disc brakes, electronic differential lock, run-flat tires and complete airbag system. Though the price tag hasn't been revealed yet, predictions are that the BMW 1 Series will appeal to younger customers. BMW 1 Series will be available at Cosmic Automobiles.



Catch 'em young

The new money-making mantra when more than half the population is below 25

Anyone at Thamel on Nepali new year's eve would have seen it was business as usual—crowded restaurants and bars, and the expected snarls in traffic. All a far cry from the riots

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed



of that very afternoon. To the Beed, it seems one particular section of Nepali youth are determinedly indifferent to political turmoil. They are young, upwardly mobile, brand sensitive, and, from what goes on in Thamel, they have money. Money that marketers are beginning to target.

More than half of Nepal's population is under 25. That is a large and fertile field to plough. So what if most young people don't have independent incomes? Their indulgent parents do, and this is why products, brands and advertisers are homing on this demographic. They are the future. And if you can create some tenuous link, some mirage of requisite 'hip'-ness, the otherwise fickle youth will offer businesses a semblance of loyalty.

Worldwide, under-25s are becoming consumers who not only buy, but also influence purchase decision. In Nepal too, with families going nuclear, younger

family members influence their parents' decision on the make of television, restaurants, car or breakfast cereal. Branding begins early. Catch 'em young is the new money-making mantra.

Our young consumers are a savvy bunch: they know originals from fakes and they'd rather die (sometimes the Beed suspects they mean it literally) than be seen shopping at downmarket places like a Khichapokhari stall or wearing a sweater that Aama

the global lingua franca, opens up new vistas of information through movies, tv and music videos. Everyone wants to be part of the 'in' group and trends are born, reach critical mass (happily for the manufacturers who rake in the moolah) and then wither away if they cannot innovate and offer something new.

Nepal's 25 million population is a big market, even compared to India and China. South Asia and South East Asia demonstrated how quickly consumerism can lubricate economic growth. When the political stalemate breaks, there is going to be an economic boom, fuelled in no small way, by young consumers spending more.

Of course all this buy, buy, buy fervour creates problems. We need only cast back to Thamel again. Under the bright city lights, young boys wearing clothes designed by American hip-hop artists fight each other in the streets. Young girls wearing short skirts and glossy lipstick solicit customers openly. They candidly tell the Beed that they've even stolen to keep up with their friends.

There is a dark side to all this consumerism so there must be a code of conduct. After all, the bottom line is not always the bottom line. ●

arthabeed@yahoo.com



“The customer is boss”

Nepali Times: Is this move going to change anything as far as Nepali consumers are concerned?

Sugat R Kansakar: We need more business sense and professionalism than in the past when we had a monopoly. Since we will now have to compete with professional and private organisations, we definitely need to envision how to capture the market and expand.

And how are you going to do that?

We shifted from Corporate Act to Company Act, the latter will guide us now. This means all financial rules and regulations within our organisation will change. Political interference will be lessened and we will have more autonomy. The biggest benefit from this change is that we can float shares. The board will decide modality and details within a few months.

But will Nepal Telecom continue as a government entity?

Yes, unless we offer bulk shares to the general public or a private investor. Right now the government owns 100 percent. We will sell shares to the public and, if the government decides, we may sell bulk shares too. That's going to be a big decision since we are among the biggest earners with almost Rs 7 billion annual gross revenue. We will float a minimum of 10 percent of shares to the general public, which means the company will still belong to the government.

How can you be sure, then, that the government will suddenly stop interfering?

There is no guarantee. But since we will be guided by the Company Act, we have to prepare our financial rules and HRD regulations accordingly. The ownership, however, remains with the government and we will have to be guided by the owner.

Does this prepare you to face the challenge from private competition?

Till yesterday, we saw ourselves as government servants who

Sugat R Kansakar is the first Managing Director of the NTC's new avatar: Nepal Telecom. Having worked for almost three decades with the organisation, he knows the days of state monopoly are over. Kansakar talks to Nepali Times about competition, demand and supply, and how the company will remake itself.

had the upper hand while dealing with clients. From tomorrow, we have to say the customer is the boss. This paradigm shift is very challenging and we've already begun training our staff. Nepal Telecommunication Authority can make any decision regarding private investors. We have no say in their decisions and must prepare for tough competition.

What new services can we expect?

We'll introduce scratch cards, which is a pre-paid card that allows the user to call anywhere in the world. This is aimed at the tourist market. At present we have around 400,000 land telephone lines and around 130,000 mobile subscribers. We also have internet services, but this sector is primarily dominated by private ISPs. We have installed VSAT telephones at almost 130 remote areas and operate VHF services at around 200 sites. We also provide lease lines to banks, ISPs and the press.

What our readers want to know is will their mobile calls get through?

There is some circuit congestion but we're doing our homework. We are going to install more capacity, and within a couple of months, the situation will improve. We're already doing better than six months ago. Congestion began because we sanctioned too many mobile lines because of a high demand.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

So it was bad planning and not bad equipment.

We had a little bit of a problem initially because the supplier was from Israel and the system from Canada. That's been cleared up now. The last tender was from China, which quoted only \$12 million. Some people suspected that the supplier might give us second-hand equipment. But it was a global contract and they won. The company itself is one of the two biggest suppliers in China.

We began our investigation on the congestion problem and found this kind of situation arose almost everywhere. In Thailand, there were 10 upgrades before the system was perfected. So far, we've have had only two.

Till the mid-80s, Nepal had the best telecom services in the region. What happened?

China and India escalated in all sectors during the last five years. We could not move as fast. We've have had lot of politics and less development. But we are ahead of Bangladesh, their telephone density is less than ours. I am confident that we will be able to provide telephone lines on a demand basis within three years because we are going to introduce CDMA (Code Division Multiplexing Access) system. This latest American technology was brought by the Reliance Group of India. Till now we had a huge gap between demand and supply, there are 300,000 applicants waiting for telephone lines.

Trekkers bring medical



The phrase 'medical tourism' gets a whole new meaning with this unique project that relies on tourists to stock remote health posts with first aid supplies



ALL PICS: JANICE BELSON

SRADDHA BASNYAT in LARJUNG



Clockwise from top: Nurse Zoe Robbins hands over a resuscitation baby to Shayam Dhaubadel, president of Siddhi Memorial Foundation, as Rami Jaffee (behind) and Dr Prakash Nidhi Tiwari look on.

Medicines for Nepal Expedition 2003 team members Gregg Hedin, Zoe Robbins and Rami Jaffee give a dental floss demonstration at the Lete Primary Health Centre.

Zoe Robbins teaches Lhakpa Dolma, the nurse at Namagyaling Serok Tibetan Settlement, how to operate a microscope donated by St John's Hospital, California.

It was pure Hollywood: a call from Los Angeles, American rockstar Rami Jaffee of the Wallflowers on his way to Nepal and, if I was ready, a helicopter to whisk us to the Annapurnas. Very high profile, but that is how Janice Belson, founder of the non-profit group Medicines Global, and her team do it.

For the past five years, Los Angeles-based Medicines for Nepal (GB) (the GB stands for 'give back') has organised one high profile trek a year to Nepal. Its goal is simple yet powerful: to make travellers aware that packing an extra first aid kit to drop off at health posts along the trails will keep them well stocked with medical supplies. All it takes is a few extra bandaids, a tube of antibacterial cream, some hydration salts and a little extra gauze. The idea is that individual travellers will supplement these annual drop-offs.

The expeditions include leaders of the outdoor manufacturers such as Leki, The North Face, Mountain Hardwear, Lowe Alpine and Sierra Designs as well as big names from the entertainment world like Rami Jaffee and Carre Otis. "Keeping it high profile is important to garner public awareness," says Janice's daughter, Johanna Belson, who is director of expeditions. It's also an opportunity to create a delivery system of basic medical supplies to places that need them.

It began in 1992 when Belson came to Nepal on a two-month photography trek in the Sagarmatha region. Along the way she noticed many malnourished children, one of whom was blind because

of Vitamin A deficiency. She also found most medicine cabinets in regional health posts sitting empty. Belson returned to the US wanting to give something back to Nepal. A couple of years later, it came to her: 'basic humanitarian first aid'. Explains Belson, "Everyone has the right to a bandaid, antibacterial cream or ibuprofen. It could prevent a simple cut from getting infected, sometimes severely."

In 1999, Belson returned to Nepal with a group that included her daughter Johanna, Usha Rai, the head of Newborn Medicine at UCLA hospital and Greg Wozer, general manager of Leki USA, which makes trekking and ski poles. The first delivery, worth \$29,200, provided enough pharmaceutical Vitamin A for 3,000 children and medical supplies for Kanti Children's Hospital and several health posts.

Having a leader from an outdoor equipment supplier and a strong medical person on the team became the model for future expeditions. Last year, on their fifth expedition, Medicines for Nepal had an eight-member team that included Gregg Hedin, the head financial controller of sporting goods company Scott USA, and 27-year-old Zoe Robbins as the team nurse. They also had over \$210,000 worth of medical supplies.

Our helicopter landed on to the rocky riverbed of the Kali Gandaki in the village of Larjung where the rest of

care to the Annapurnas

the Medicines team had already arrived after drop offs at Jomsom Hospital and Namgyaling Tibetan Settlement outside Marpha. The team stopped at all the major health posts along the main trail. The next stop was Lete, a few hours hike south.

We found that although infant mortality was lower here than the national average, dysentery, diarrhoea, worms, skin diseases and gastritis are the top five killers. Health Assistant Tulasi Prasad Bhatta tells us, "We don't charge for medicines but what the government assigns is inadequate." The Lete centre, with its neat cascade chart of staff names and designations and tidy rooms is far better off than the health post at Tatopani, which has a bed and a doctor's desk crammed into its single dingy room. But no matter what the appointments, one complaint is consistent: the government just doesn't send enough medicines.

The numbers look good in Myagdi: there are 40 government health institutions for 120,000 people, including one district hospital in Beni, primary healthcare centres, health posts and sub health posts. It may make seem like a reasonable ratio considering the population, but the picture is bleak when we consider that the government spends only \$3 annually per person on health.

Why the Annapurna region? Johanna Belson explains how the organisation hoped to primarily establish a proper distribution mechanism in an area where

travellers are certain to go: "Even though the Annapurna is known to be better off than other areas, we found that our supplies were definitely needed." They're counting on these travellers returning to Nepal and going to more remote areas to make similar drop-offs.

Over the years, Medicines for Nepal has given supplies to the Maternity Hospital in Thapathali, Bir Hospital, TU Teaching Hospital, Siddhi Memorial Foundation in Bhaktapur and Tashi Palkhiel Tibetan Settlement in Pokhara. They have a long standing rapport with Kanti Children's Hospital where they are raising funds for Prakash Nidhi Tiwari to join a fellowship at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles, the world's leading facility for paediatric oncology. Tiwari will then return to develop Nepal's first paediatric cancer ward. Sponsors like the i2 Foundation, Operation USA who provide Vitamin A, Adventure Medical Kits who donate almost \$10,000 in medical supplies every year and many others make the project successful. "We are most directly focused on Nepal. Our five successful deliveries to Nepal have an accumulated retail value of donated supplies that amount to \$611,417," says 60-year-old Belson, whose group is now focusing this fall's expedition on raising funds and medical donations for Beni Hospital.

The program has critics who question the holistic approach of the organisation and ask whether this kind of work actually



does more harm than good. One strong voice against what he calls "medical tourism" is Stephen Bezruchka at the International Health Program at the University of Washington. His own experience in Nepal since his first visit in 1969, ten years of which he spent working as a medical tourist, has led Bezruchka to the conclusion that such projects detract from healthcare facilities already being developed in an area.

Local experts are also concerned about travellers distributing medicine. Buddha Basnyat, a specialist in high altitude medicine, understands what motivates people to bring medicines in, but he says, "They have a moral responsibility to make sure the

medicines are properly used." This includes making certain the medicines reach trained personnel and that possible side effects are explained. There are other concerns that attractively packaged foreign medicines will compete with locally manufactured ones. But there is the counter-argument that Medicines for Nepal at least provides medicines where there aren't any, and has a regular channel to keep the supplies going to remote health posts. And for Nepalis that may just mean the difference between life and death. ●

Contact
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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Move to reconcile

Samay,15-22 April

समय

Excerpts from an interview with Taranath Ranabhat, speaker of the House of Representatives in the Deuba government.

Is there a way out of the present constitutional and political turmoil?

The constitution can be made active only by restoring the House of Representatives. The state cannot run democratically without a parliament. At present, everything from law reforms to budget announcements happen through royal directives. This is undemocratic. The country cannot go on like this. Elections are the only way out. There must be unity between the parties and the king.

Why wasn't it possible to restore the parliament?

Sher Bahadur Deuba should have recommended the reinstatement of the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, he was unable to do so. The king cannot restore the parliament. The power rested in the hands of the prime minister.

Are elections even possible under the present circumstances?

If elections help establish a people's representative, then it is still possible. The government must create an environment where the party and the candidates can reach out to the masses and find a way for voters to register their choices easily. There seems little possibility that this government will see it through.

What about the Maoists?

Peace talks must begin before the elections. The Maoists have to be convinced that their victory is not possible with guns. The security forces should be mobilised to make the Maoists come to the table. We should not gear the situation towards victory or defeat by engaging the two armies. No matter who dies or gets defeated, we are all Nepalis.

Do you think the political parties will forsake their movement for elections?

First of all, it is necessary to reach an understanding between the king and the parties. I made a plea with the king recently. I also met Girija on the same issue. The prime minister is the king's closest advisor who is also accountable to the people. He must make the first move. But it seems like he is the main person behind the present problem. On the other hand, Thapa's government has adopted a strong strategy to control the parties' movement.

And what is the king's role in the compromise?

The party leaders should sit down with the king and reach a consensus. They should stop being stubborn.

Why haven't you participated in the ongoing movement?

I have certain limits as a Speaker. Moreover, I played my own role in finding a solution to the present political problem. It is unnecessary to go to Ratna Park armed with stones.

'Talk to us'

Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani on *BBC Nepali Service*, 18 April

३३८

"We don't intend to suppress the parties' movement. We have differences starting with the very foundation of their protests. They say their movement is against our government which, in their view, is unconstitutional because it was formed under Article 127. What they have to bear in mind is that even if they were to form a government now, it will be under the same constitutional provision. How then, can they say our government is part of the regression?"

"It is alright for them to hold rallies, organise mass meetings and mobilise people: we have not stopped them. What we don't want to see is the destruction of public property and arson during these rallies. When we try to bring the situation under control, the destruction continues. We received information about Maoist infiltration without the knowledge of the Nepali Congress and the UML. The rebels are trying to use this movement to their advantage. I am sure neither the NC nor the UML leaders were behind the torching of trucks. I doubt these democratic leaders gave instructions to set fire to personal and public property."

"The leaders of the parties claim that the protestors are under control, but recent developments suggest otherwise. We repeatedly asked the parties to talk to us. We don't understand why they have difficulty talking to us when they seem to be at ease meeting with the Maoists."

"The government is trying to maintain security and peace. We put our point across and hope the parties will do the same in a peaceful manner. We need solutions at a national level. There is no need to panic."



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Across the line

Rajdhani, 17 April

राजधानी

It's a terrible life for the security forces: days spent in the scorching heat on an empty stomach, waiting for orders from superiors and always on the ready for an attack launched by protestors. Even when rocks and bricks fly and find their mark, they cannot retaliate without orders. "Look at how the demonstrators are attacking us, don't we have any human rights?" asks a security personnel wearing a broken helmet. He adds that the security forces never had to confront such a situation until the demonstrators took to the street. Now they have to report for duty at odd hours and under difficult situations.

According to the District Police Office, more than 1,600 security personnel were posted in the Valley's trouble spots. More than 40 have been seriously injured. The Home Ministry's joint secretary Umesh Mainali admits that the government hasn't made proper arrangements for the forces. "Due to our limited resources we are obliged to make them to go hungry," says Mainali.

Police officer Dipak Ranjit says that the security forces restrain themselves despite severe provocation from demonstrators.

"They are just following orders from the government," says Ranjit. The agitation leaders should think of what the police have to face before throwing bricks at them he adds. Ranjit is concerned that demonstrators are dehumanising security personnel, even as human rights activists are vocally supporting the former.

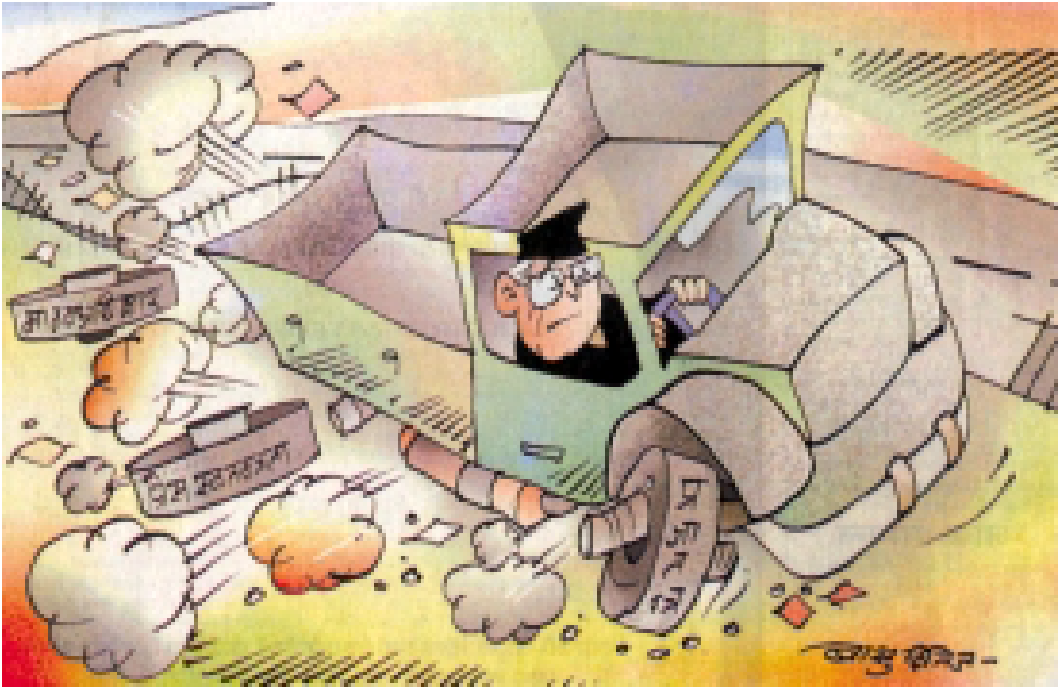
Under control"

NC leader Chakra Prasad Bastola in *Drishti*, 20 April

दृष्टि

The ongoing movement of the five political parties has won the support of different professional organisations. This indicates that we are heading toward victory. The demonstrations that were initially centred in Kathmandu have now expanded to the headquarters of outlying districts.

The issue of people's participation cannot be judged with a mechanical yardstick. The number of participants fluctuate, more join in when the demonstrations are peaceful. You can't make a people's movement happen, it has to be spontaneous. The public participate when they discover that the issues raised by the parties are relevant to their lives. That is how the movement expands. Considering the



Wheels: Human Rights, Press Freedom, Democracy

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक *Spacetime*, 18 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"What is this government doing? Even a hospital is not safe anymore."

Manita Karki with her one-year-old daughter who vomited after police tear-gassed a local hospital at Putali Sadak. *Kantipur*, 22 April

overwhelming response from professional organisations and the people joining us, the movement has certainly reached new heights. By detaining the leaders of People’s Front Nepal and student protestors, the government is trying to break our unity. There is a difference between the People’s Front and the Maoists. The rebels took up arms while we chose to stay in parliament. The more the government suppresses us, the more intense things will get.

The government will ultimately have to give up. What perplexes me is the government’s attitude. We always said our movement will be peaceful but they charge at us with batons, yet fail to rescue police abducted by the Maoists. It is surprising to see that the state is unable to fight the rebels but is quite adept at suppressing those who want the people’s sovereignty restored.

The same government turns a blind eye to Maoists occupying district headquarters yet recovers its vision to see the rebels infiltrating our demonstrations.

They need to understand that people from different walks of life are part of this movement. Therefore, things might not go as planned. The hurling of stones and bricks by protestors is not something we want, but it happens. It’s part of the process. Save for those minor hiccups, the movement is very much under the control of the organising parties.

Maoist utopia

.....
Drishhti, 20 April

DANG—Although the Maoists have destroyed infrastructure and public property all over the country, they are starting with development in their ‘special district’ that combines parts of Rolpa and Rukum. Areas of Rukum’s Mahat VDC, Chunbang, Kakri, Kol, Taksera, Hukam, Maikot and Arjal and

parts of Rolpa such as Uba, Mirol Kureli and Jelbang have also been incorporated into the special district. The area that falls under the Magarat Autonomous People’s Government and has communistic governance.

The local government has set up various departments agriculture, education and industry, and have initiated projects. Similarly, a separate department has been constituted to look after legal problems. Communes and collective agriculture have been started where people share the harvests and private ownership is frowned upon. The party funds the purchase of seeds and afterwards buys the produce.

Farmers say they are happy with the new system: “Earlier, we had a difficult time scraping together two meals a day but now we have no such problems. This is a real communist system.” The education department is busy formulating new courses and building schools. Regular school inspections are conducted and teachers are forced to adopt new Maoist calendars. Teachers from Taksera High School told visitors: “We have almost forgotten the holidays we had in the old calendar.” Asked about the recruitment of children, they have a prompt answer: “Everybody has to join us whenever there is an intense conflict with the forces of the old regime.”

In a few places, the Maoists have restarted small hydroelectric projects. Officials at the Maoists’ industrial department said the party earns revenue from manufacturing units running in the special district. They claim the area is self-sufficient. The entire area is a-flutter with Maoist flags and welcome arches. Every family has to send at least one member to fight for the Maoists. Despite the positive changes, the people admit to feeling worried about their security. (Nepalnews.com)



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Our ordeal

Journalists Hari Bahadur Thapa and Khim Ghale recount their arrest at a political rally in Kantipur, 18 April

कान्तिपुर

It was 10PM and the two of us were still in custody at the Singha Darbar ward police. A few journalists came to see us, including the president and general secretary of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ). They told us that the Home Ministry had issued a statement saying we were detained because we manhandled security personnel and stoned them.


We were surprised and upset. It was then that the FNJ decided to seek the resignation of the home minister, a public apology from Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa and resolved to start our own movement if we were not released. The incident was an eye-opener for professional introspection. There we were, on the streets to gather information on the ongoing street protests. We were arrested although our

press passes were displayed prominently. We were stopped in front of the Red Cross office and other fellow journalists asked why we were being taken. The security personnel answered, “We’re just following higher orders.” After the initial skirmish, just two of us were taken. A police officer grabbed our collars, kicked us and hit us with batons, taking care to aim at our heads. We were then brought to Singha Darbar like petty criminals.


We were framed. It was a lesson on how officialdom distorts facts. And these very “facts” are those we, as journalists, reported over the years. It is our right to provide unbiased and accurate reporting. Free press must have access to the field.

Could they have mistaken our pen and notepads for sticks and bricks? We challenge the government to give legitimate cause for our arrest. After spending the night in custody, a police officer came early the next morning and asked for a list of our visitors. A few hours later, the chief of the station let us go, saying again that he had received orders from higher up.

Who is this elusive ‘higher-up’? Is it the home minister? If so, why did he try to frame us? It was probably intended to intimidate the entire the press corps, otherwise over 70 journalists would not have been arrested that day.



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announces the 8th
Immersion Course on Contemporary Social Issues

Applications are invited for the 8th session of the Immersion Course to begin from 31 May 2004. The objective of the Course is to enable Nepali graduates to intellectually comprehend critical contemporary issues through an intense exposure to the social sciences as they relate to Nepali society. The Course consists of a total of eleven modules. Each module, apart from Research Methodology, will take one week. The Research Methodology module lasts six weeks.

The moderators for the coming session are: Sudhindra Sharma (Introduction to Sociology & Anthropology/Introduction to Nepali Society & Culture), Kunda Dixit (Media & Society), Dipak Gyawali (Economics & Society), Ajaya Dixit (Technology & Society), Pratyoush Onta (History & Society), Krishna Bhattachan (Ethnicity & Society), Seira Tamang (Gender & Society), Hari Sharma (Politics & Society), Shanta Dixit (Education & Society) and Sudhindra Sharma/Dilli Ram Dahal (Research Methodology).

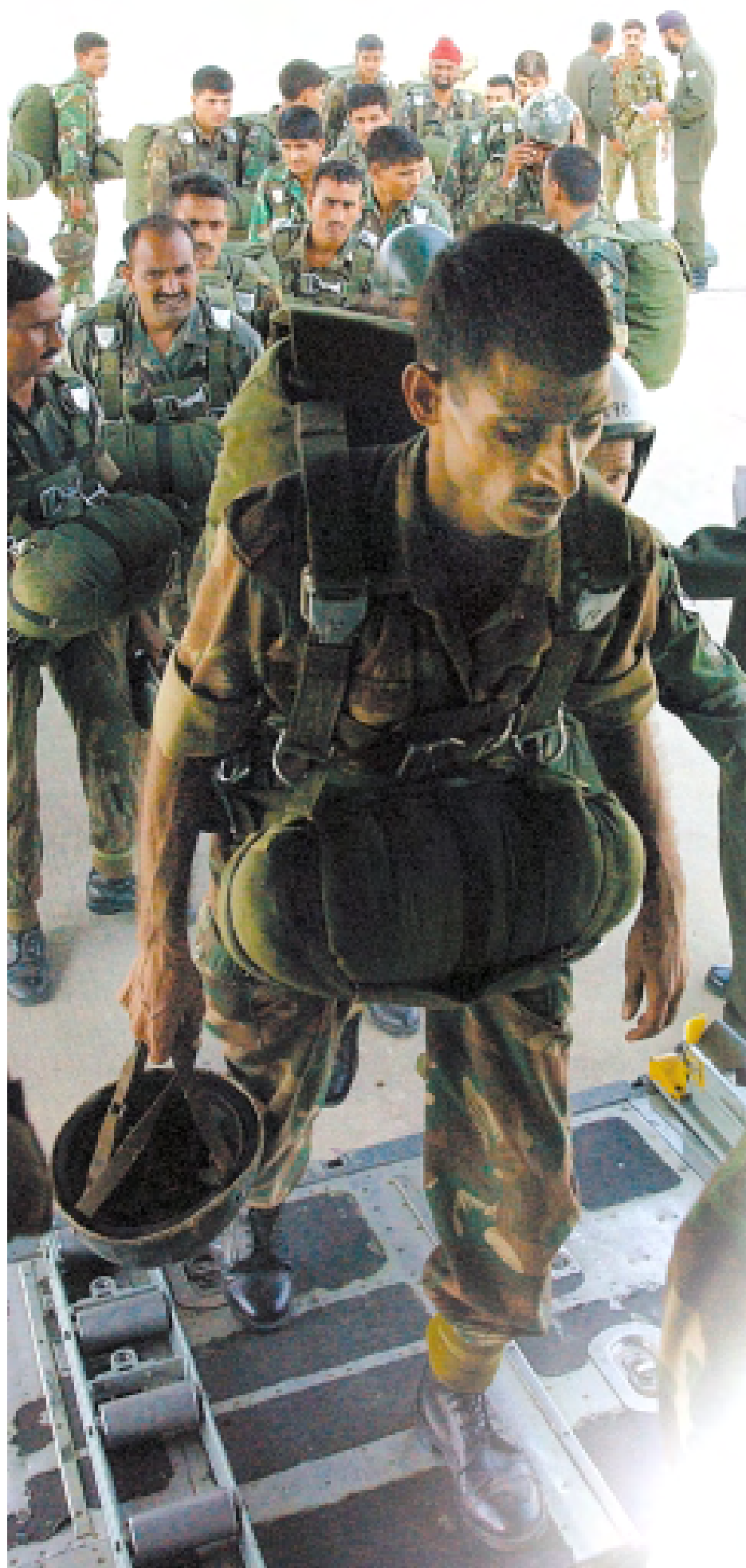
Basic qualification: Bachelor’s degree and good grasp of English
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Application deadline: 11 May 2004
Course fee: Rs 10,000 (course material included)

Fellowships will be provided to deserving participants from disadvantaged groups, women and members of college faculty. Also, deserving candidates based outside the Kathmandu Valley will be awarded fellowships as well as living expenses for the duration of the course. Participants will also have free access to the Social Science Baha Library during the course duration.

For details, please visit www.himalassociation.org/baha/immersion or call 5542544/5548142.

Application forms are available from Social Science Baha, Himal Association, Patan Dhoka, and can also be downloaded from our web-site.

The Immersion Course is run by the Social Science Baha with support from the Rato Bangla Foundation and Inter-Disciplinary Analysts.

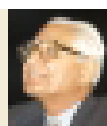


Will they, won't they

South Asia is still unsure about sending troops to Iraq

The US government's renewal of an earlier request to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to send troops to Iraq has been made necessary by the turn of recent events in that country, aflame with attacks against the occupying forces. These three South Asian countries are among the ones that usually contribute troops in fair numbers for peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. Why these countries have not responded positively so far is because of

COMMENT
MB Naqvi



the doubtful
legality
of last

year's invasion of Iraq. All three countries have not found it a legally legitimate war that could be approved by the United Nations.

Their stance was, and remains, that unless the UN Security Council passes another resolution accepting the peacekeeping in Iraq, it will not be possible for them to send their troops there. One circumstance makes the new request embarrassing for all three governments: the painful sequel to last year's Iraq war has meant that maintaining US occupation there involves very high cost in lives and money. Sending troops under today's conditions is likely to be opposed by a wide swath of opinion as helping an immoral operation of the United States, because the morality of the Iraq war continues to be widely questioned more than one year into the US-led occupation.

For India, the issue cannot be decided until after the four-stage general election that started on 20 April and concludes 10 May. If a new parliament and government is in by mid-May, the earliest the new government can take up this question is the third or fourth week of May. But for now, there remain two uncertainties for Indian decision-making on the subject.

One is the absence of UN cover for the operation. As yet there is no certainty because it will depend on what the US government concedes to the United Nations in terms of international law. The second

uncertainty is more complex.

No Indian can underrate the strategic partnership with the US government. Thus the Indian attitude is sure to be theoretically helpful toward the US government. There is no likelihood of a new government in India that will wish to walk out of this strategic friendship.

In Bangladesh, Dhaka's decision-makers will be less inhibited in helping the US government—their traditional friend and donor—though the issues of international law will have as much relevance to Dhaka as to New Delhi. Moreover, public opinion in Bangladesh is divided: the opposition Awami League tends to take a more sympathetic view on the US concerns, but the other major party, the governing Bangladesh Nationalist Party, often beats the Awami League in the friendliness of its approach to the United States. As it is constituted, the government contains religiously oriented Islamic parties and its sympathies today are wholly anti-US.

Pakistan's case is different. President Gen Pervez Musharraf is the fulcrum on which Pakistan-US friendship turns and he is perhaps the most pro-US politician in South Asia. He has earned for Pakistan the dubious honour of being a major NATO ally of the United States. He is perhaps anxious to please the US government. But he has unseen shackles on his political feet: his power base is the army and it is largely pro-US—that is, except an unknown part that sympathises with radical Islamic causes around the world. Musharraf has largely consolidated his power as an all-powerful president. But his effective allies in politics are nobodies in leading any significant section of the population. Worse, he still depends on Islamist parties, which constitute a third of the parliament, for major political decisions. Islamist parties, to no one's surprise, are viscerally anti-US despite their past close cooperation with the United States. The Pakistan government, due to rampant anti-US sentiment, denies that it has agreed to send 10,000 troops to Iraq. ● (IPS)

A sinking feeling in Maldives

The Maldives is threatened with extinction because of a projected rise in sea level caused by global warming. "My country is like a can of tuna fish," says Maldivian Foreign Minister Fathulla Jameel, "because it comes with an expiry date."

The UN says climate change and rising sea levels pose "a major threat to the very existence" of small island developing states (SIDS)—specifically the Maldives, Tuvalu and many other tiny islands in the Pacific, which may vanish completely in the next 25 to 30 years. "Global warming and climate change have brought an increase in extreme weather events, coral bleaching, coastal erosion, the disruption of agricultural activity and vector-borne diseases and reduced resilience of land and marine ecosystems," warns UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a report.

A recent three-day meeting on SIDS highlighted the problems of small island states and was also foreshadowed an upcoming UN conference on SIDS, scheduled for Mauritius on 30 August-3 September, mainly to discuss the "serious shortfalls" in implementing the 1994 Barbados Program of Action (Bpoa). UN Under-Secretary-General Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, the designated secretary-general of the Mauritius event, admits that one of the biggest problems SIDS face is their small size and miniscule populations, which often limit critical projects and discourage external involvement and financing. One way to address this would be to establish regional programs with national components, and have a more dynamic monitoring mechanism to ensure commitments made at the conference are honoured.

At a meeting in the Bahamas last January, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) accused the World Trade Organisation (WTO) of neglecting their concerns, saying that trade liberalisation, accompanied by erosion of trade preferences, is having severe consequences on the already fragile economies and social stability, health and education of SIDS.

Since preferential arrangements for commodities such as sugar, bananas, coffee and coconut have been dismantled under the WTO rules, many small island states that depended heavily on the export of these products for their national revenues have suffered. AOSIS Chairman Jagdish Koonjul of Mauritius says it is also essential to recognise new challenges for SIDS, which include the HIV/AIDS pandemic and new security concerns. ● (Thalif Deen/IPS)





Worn out welcome

There must not be a permanent Coalition occupation in Iraq

Iraq may slowly be emerging from a month of the most intense bloodshed since the declared end of the war. But a lull in the fighting in the bloodstained Sunni town of Faluja, west of Baghdad, and a tentative deal with the Sadr Shia militia in the south seem

ANALYSIS
Ferry Biederman

exceedingly fragile. If there is a pause, nobody expects it to last very long. It now becomes crucial for the international community as well as the US-dominated coalition that occupies Iraq to quickly formulate some policies that may avert the next round of fighting.

In order to formulate a response to the fighting now, the United States will have to take into account the growing unease with the presence of its troops in Iraq. Commanders have made it clear that despite the planned handover of political power on 30 June, the military could stay on indefinitely.

Most Shias, who form the majority in Iraq, initially welcomed the US deposing their arch-enemy Saddam Hussein. They even were ready to tolerate the presence of foreign troops for a transition period until order was restored. That does not mean that they were ready to accept open-ended occupation, especially now that Saddam Hussein has been caught.

It would be a mistake to ignore earlier comments by apparently moderate Shia leaders such as Grand Ayatollah

Sistani that the US troops should not overstay their welcome. This goes against two other US, and possibly international, interests. First, the United States has a commitment to the Kurdish minority in the north, which under no circumstances will allow a central government to rule it again. Then there is also the restive and radicalised Sunni minority in the centre of the country, many of whom had a stake in the old Baathist regime. Sistani was especially opposed to the clauses that gave the two ethnic minorities separate guarantees that seemed to interfere with the Shias' claim to overall power.

The fighting in the south broke out soon after Sistani was forced to back down, and the constitution was signed after all. Circumstances also contributed to the timeliness of such a demonstration of might. The Shias were shocked by the attacks in March during the holiest day of their religious calendar, the Ashura, when more than 170 people were killed. After the attacks in Kerbala and Baghdad during the Ashura, Shia anger was for the first time clearly aimed at Westerners.

What emerges is a picture with at least four main elements that affect the violence in Iraq. The heavy-handed US response to attacks raises the number of victims in a dangerous way. Secondly, there is a perception of now open-ended occupation by the United States and its close allies. Thirdly, the coalition is seen as incapable of providing

security for the population. Finally, it exposes the jockeying for political position among different ethnic, religious and political groups in Iraq in the context of the June handover.

The questions over the future of Iraq and the fear of permanent occupation can only be addressed by involving the United Nations and finding a formula under which foreign troops will remain in the country under an international mandate. Security will probably not be fully restored unless Iraqi forces are involved. Over the last couple of weeks they have shown themselves incapable or unwilling to play a strong role. Clearly, much more work needs to be done on rebuilding Iraqi forces. On the other hand, despite much criticism of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the Iraqi Governing Council, this structure provided the first attempt for Iraqis to jointly run their country on relatively democratic principles.

The CPA's failures are manifold—its abolition of the Iraqi army, its failure to quickly restore utilities, its lack of democratic spirit in its approach to the Iraqi population. Even so, it is hard to see how the different political, ethnic and religious groups in Iraq can find common ground outside the political framework that the CPA has initiated. That is why it is important to stick to the 30 June deadline and to the interim constitution that has been negotiated so painstakingly. ● (IPS)

Living with insecurity

Freedom isn't enough

I have often wondered why Karl Popper ended the dramatic peroration of the first volume of his *Open Society and Its Enemies* with the sentence: "We must go on into the unknown, the uncertain and insecure, using what reason we have to plan for both security and freedom." Is not freedom enough? Why put security on the same level as that supreme value?

Then one remembers that Popper was writing in the final years of World War II. Looking around the world in 2004, you begin to understand Popper's motive: freedom always means living with risk, but without

COMMENT
Ralf Dahrendorf



security, risk means only threats, not opportunities. Examples abound. Things in Iraq may not be as bad as the daily news of bomb attacks make events sound, but it is clear that

there will be no lasting progress towards a liberal order in the country without basic security. Afghanistan's story is even more complex, though the same is true there. But who provides security, and how?

In Europe and the West, there is the string of terrorist acts—from those on the US in 2001 to the pre-election bombings in Madrid—to think about. London's mayor and police chief have jointly warned that terrorist attacks in the city are "inevitable". Almost every day there are new warnings, with heavily armed policemen in the streets, concrete barriers appearing in front of embassies and public buildings, stricter controls at airports and elsewhere—each a daily reminder of the insecurity that surrounds us.

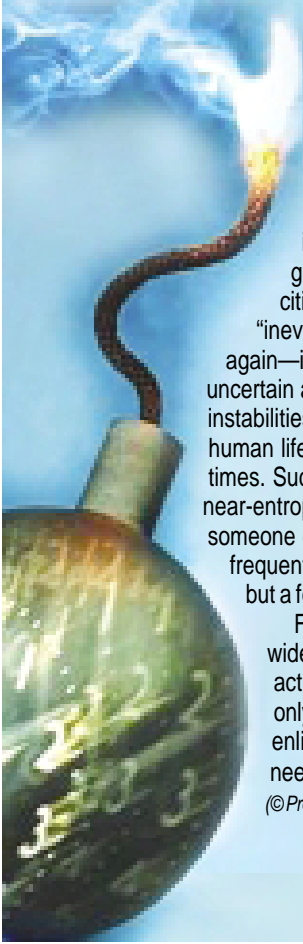
Nor is it only bombs that add to life's general uncertainties. Gradually, awareness is setting in that global warming is not just a gloom and doom fantasy. Social changes add to such insecurities. All at once we seem to hear two demographic time-bombs ticking: the continuing population explosion in parts of the third world and the astonishing rate of aging in the first world. What will this mean for social policy? How will mass migration affect countries' cultural heritage?

There is also a widespread sense of economic insecurity. No sooner is an upturn announced, it falters. At any rate, employment seems to have become decoupled from growth. Millions worry about their jobs—and thus the quality of their lives—in addition to fearing for their personal security. Such examples serve to show that the most disquieting aspect of today's insecurity may well be the diversity of its sources, and that there are no clear explanations and simple solutions. Even a formula like "war on terror" simplifies a more complex phenomenon.

So what should we do? Perhaps we should look at Popper again and remember his advice: to use what reason we have to tackle our insecurities. In many cases this requires drastic measures, particularly insofar as our physical security is concerned. But while it is hard to deny that such measures are necessary, it is no less necessary to remember the other half of the phrase: "security and freedom".

Checks on security measures that curtail the freedoms that give our lives dignity are as imperative as protection. Such checks can take many forms. One is to make all such measures temporary by giving these new laws and regulations "sunset clauses" that limit their duration. Security must not become a pretext for suspending and destroying the liberal order. A second requirement is that we look ahead more effectively. It is not necessary for us to wait for great catastrophes to occur if we can see them coming. Holland does not have to sink into the North Sea before we do something about the world's climate: pensions do not have to decline to near-zero before social policies are adjusted.

A third need is to preserve, and in many cases to recreate, what one might call "islands of security". Globalisation must become



"glocalisation": there is value in the relative certainties of local communities, small companies, human associations. Such islands are not sheltered and protected spaces, but models for others. They prove that, up to a point, security can be provided without loss of freedom.

There remains the most fundamental issue of attitude. It is debatable whether governments should ever frighten their citizens by painting the horror scenario of "inevitable" attack. The truth—to quote Popper again—is that "we must go on into the unknown, the uncertain and insecure," come what may. Today's instabilities may be unusually varied and severe, but human life is one of ceaseless uncertainty at all times. Such uncertainty can lead to a frozen state of near-entropy. More frequently, uncertainty leads to someone claiming to know how to eliminate it—frequently through arbitrary powers that benefit but a few.

False gods have always profited from a widespread sense of insecurity. Against them, an active effort to tackle the risks around us is the only answer. Perhaps we need a new enlightenment to spread the confidence we need to live with insecurity in freedom. ●

(© Project Syndicate)

Ralf Dahrendorf is an author and former Rector of the London School of Economics.

More than just pretty pictures

Poet and photographer Wayne Amtzis offers us his worldview

Wayne Amtzis' third exhibition in the Siddhartha Gallery juxtaposes harsh, colourless reality with the power of creation and fancy. His photographs present the paradox that demands we take responsibility for the world around us—considering the undignified, the nameless, the overworked and all those who, like mute animals, make life easier for us—and yet find a way out of its snares, snatching moments of liberation and relief.

The black and white Street Life exhibition is a direct projection of the callous indifference marking city life. In 'Sleeping Porters, Nag Pokhari' emaciated men use a cement block and a cart for beds, their

skeleton for mattresses. These photos are a comment on what we, the privileged, don't want to witness, don't want to be a part of. A few photos are pictures of pictures.

REVIEW

Smriti Jaiswal

In 'Icons' Mahatma Gandhi, Marx, Ambedkar and Jesus stare at us. If they are a celebration of or a reminder of who we ought to be, what answers might we have for them?

Still Life casts a different aura. If a mood can be represented graphically, if imagination and expression can be manifested through the physical, then Amtzis' work which consists of found, almost stumbled upon, objects, is vividly eloquent. The photographs illustrate the artist's observant mind, his perception of the most trivial, his struggle and gain amidst waste and loss. Roadside scraps, backyard booty evoking forgotten times or a lost childhood seem to reveal a mood and meaning otherwise overlooked. The evocations of colour, the shaping power of aesthetics and the transformations of desire are all captured in these photos. A rusted bucket is presented as a gaudy base holding an equally bright rag. A tarnished iron stove retains its oxidized state as it becomes a reservoir of light and wealth.



Poetry is a recurring image in this poet-photographer's work. In Street Life, poems appear as commentary. In Still Life, typewritten, termite-eaten, worn to shreds, Amtzis' earlier poems weave themselves into the substance of the photos. Set as background, they complement shapes and objects and comment on them at the same time. In 'Graverobbers' a jawbone (teeth still intact) seems to have scavenged the pages and the leaves on which it is set. The experimentation in 'Exile' not only adds an embossed effect, but actually transforms verse into a level, floating, map of exile.

The echoing of image and theme is strong throughout these photos: prayer beads, the yinyang and the Kala Chakra are set beside everyday objects like taps, gloves and bowls, and astride aggrandising words whose meaning escapes us. One of the most disturbing pictures is 'Doll'. A lifesize doll in a pretty blue frock is strapped to a pole of what looks like a sawmill. She stares from two angry, sunken sockets, her hands spookily curled by her side. Standing before it can be hard. It accuses too directly.

Amtzis has more than just photos to offer. He has a worldview. A promise both of sensitivity and recklessness. As life, in the experience of it, should always be. ●

Still life/ Street life Photographs by Wayne Amtzis, till 3 May at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited



Lal Singh Gurung joined the British Gurkhas at 14. In his oral testimony he describes how he managed to get recruited, despite being an inch shorter than regulation. His first few years in the army, just before World War II, is spent in training and fighting minor skirmishes like against the Nagas in northeast India. His story appears with that of several other Gurkha soldiers in Himal Books' *Lahure ka Katha*. It has been translated from Nepali by Dev Bahadur Thapa for *Nepali Times*.

“I faked my height”

I was born at Deopur Langdi village in Parbat district on 16 June 1917. My mother died when I was three days old, but my grandmother took good care of me so I was well-built compared to others motherless children.

A recruiter came to our village when I was 14 years and seven months old and took my measurements. My height was marked zero, which means I was below the required 61-inch minimum. Despite this, my relative subedar Dhan Bahadur sent me with another recruiter. I went to Kunraghat in Gorakhpur to join the army. It took us a full seven days to get there.

On the way the recruiter stopped at Waling to get a bamboo vessel of concentrated lemon juice. On our arrival at Kunraghat he asked me to carry the drink and took me to the jamadar. For an hour they discussed matters of the service. Then the jamadar pointed at me and asked, “Ganesh! Who is this boy?”

“My younger brother-in-law sir.” “He looks like he has just been weaned off his mother!”

“No sir, he came to Nautanwa to see me. He insists that he will take my place in the service when I retire. In the mean time he brought this with him.”

When the jamadar asked what it contained, the recruiter said it contained pure concentrated lemon juice. The jamadar turned to me, “How many lemon plants do you have at your place, boy?” I kept mum as I wasn't sure what I was expected to say. The recruiter quickly stepped in by saying he had scolded all the way from Nautawa and so I had lost

my tongue. “Seven, sir, he has seven lemon plants,” he added.

A while later the jamadar asked me to get up and stretch my hands. He said since my fingers were long, I would grow. The next day was the selection of recruits at the parade ground. While the officer was taking measurement I raised my heel a little bit as I had been instructed. This increased my height by one inch and the examiner wrote down 61 inches. I got through the medical examination and was enlisted on 1 December 1932.

I was then asked to list what skills I had. All I could do was to count till 10, and that too in my native Gurung language. During three days of our stay there we were taught how to use a tin toilet and shown where to eat. We were then put on a train and four nights later we arrived at Abbottabad cantonment. We trained for 22 days.

There I met subedar Dhan Bahadur, the relative who arranged my enlistment. He came close to me and we were introduced to each other. He instructed me to address him as ‘father’. He was the senior-most subedar there and I became the son of a subedar. My height was measured once more, this time by a British officer. Of course this time I was an inch less, and the officer remarked the long journey seemed to have decreased my height. He prescribed an additional diet of one tablespoonful of cod liver oil, a quarter pound of milk and a quarter pound of meat with every meal. Since I didn't eat meat, I gave the portion to my friends. After three months I reached my goal of 61

inches. I was asked to forego one of the things in the supplementary diet and I opted to give up meat. However I continued taking cod liver oil and milk for one full year.

After 10 months of training, we had to report back to our respective battalions. I was placed in B company under subedar major Dhan Bahadur. We underwent three months additional training in the hills of Abbottabad. On completing three years and two months in the service, one is entitled to earned leave. I came home for six months, plus the 28 days additional leave granted for travel time for those from Parbat, Baglung and Lamjung districts. During that leave I got married to the 11-year-old daughter of my paternal aunt. At the end of my leave I rejoined my unit at the new base in Kohima. We fought the Nagas. Then I was sent to a training centre where recruits were enlisted and trained. I helped train not only Gurkhas but even British recruits.

In 1934 and 1935 rumours were rife that war had started in Japan and that Mussolini of Italy and Hitler of Germany were going to join hands. There were also rumours that Abyssinia in Africa belonged to Italy, and that this prompted a German attack. Despite this, the Mussolini signed an agreement with Hitler. For becoming allies, Hitler offered to return the land back to Italy. That was followed by propaganda that the Germans would come any day. Stories that Japan too had advanced up to Burma started spreading. That was the beginning of the World War II.



BIGBEN



Thanks to the help of a generous donor, Chitwan rhinos learn to cope with the recurrent floods...



Golf psychology

It is a mind game, not a power game

A good golfer needs a good golf swing. A great golfer needs a strong mind. There are many who are able to swing and hit the ball like Tiger Woods, Ernie Els or Phil Mickelson, but when it comes down to winning golf tournaments, what counts is how mentally strong and gutsy they are.

Over my amateur and professional golf career, my experienced is that often golfers get on the first tee with lots of hope for a good round. If they happen to start badly, then within the first few holes they get into a totally negative mind set. The result: a disastrous score.

Let's try and find ways to avoid this happening to you.

Do not let your performance over the first four or five holes determine how you are going to think. It basically comes down to: "Are you going to let your mind control the golf ball, or your golf ball control your mind?"

It is imperative that from the start you set your mind on how you are going to approach your round, and not allow yourself to change that, whether you get off to a good start or not. It is common for golfers to approach the first tee with hope, and if things don't go perfectly, to all of a sudden start beating themselves up, getting lost in self pity. They play the next couple of holes badly, forecast further gloom and doom and then simply give up.

It is very important to think positively throughout the round. Sometimes birdies come in the first few holes, and other times the birdies fall in the last holes. Never give up until you are done. Keep up the fighting spirit until the very last hole.

Of course, you will always feel more confident if you know your rules. We can help you out here as well, answering a complex golfing problem:

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Q: A is playing a match against B. A hooked a drive into a hazard, and the ball was playable. A had to walk a long ways into the hazard to play the ball, and to save time, A took three clubs along with him to have a choice as to the right one to use. A chose his club and leaned the other two clubs against a tree in the hazard. B saw this and wanted to penalize A for grounding the club in the hazard. Is B right?

A: Rule 13-4 covers the situation of the player's ball in the hazard. If you will note exception 1-b, you will see that provided nothing is done that constitutes testing the condition of the hazard or improving the lie of the ball, then there is no penalty if A places extra clubs in the hazard. Even if A had rested all three clubs against the tree before playing the shot or even used one like a cane to keep from falling when entering the hazard, there is no penalty provided he didn't test the condition or improve his lie. But remember, under decision 13/4-2, you can't lean on your clubs while waiting to play a shot from the hazard— that is two stroke penalty in stroke play or loss of hole in match play.

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

Prince of Monaco

Didier Deschamps is football royalty for taking his club to the Champions League semi-final

AMY LAWRENCE

Monaco's incredible journey has been funded by sweat, smiles, inspiration and nothing more expensive than the salaries of three loan players. Back in the summer, Didier Deschamps could not afford to waste too much time. Monaco's plight required maximum energy and imagination. It was all hands to the pump to appeal against relegation, to guard his young, talented team from swooping vultures and to find a solution after losing their best striker, Shabani Nonda, to a longterm injury. It was a moment Deschamps, 34 at the time, will reflect upon in future as a critical moment in his apprenticeship.

Think about it. Only 34 years old. Yet within a matter of months Deschamps has unravelled a complex web of problems so successfully that visitors to the club's website are asked: "Can Monaco win the double of Le Championnat and Champions League?" That the question even exists is one oversized feather in his beret. Earlier this season Deschamps had considered it almost impossible for a French team to lift Europe's weightiest trophy. Reminded of the remark, he grins and cheekily raps: 'Almost'

Inside a rickety temporary office perched on a mountainside overlooking the Mediterranean, this stocky little guy with spiky, silvery hair and squashed features holds court with supreme confidence. Deschamps talks football management—technical, tactical, physical, mental, economical, psychological—like an absolute natural. He is a great coach waiting to happen. He oozes authority. He understands. He instructs. He plots. Even though he is far less than a generation older than most of his players, you can tell they already hang on his every word.

Fernando Morientes, the Real Madrid striker who was persuaded to cover for Nonda—arguably the transfer coup of the season—has become symbolic of Deschamps' managerial shrewdness. "Phenomenal" is the Spaniard's choice of word to describe his new boss. "Why? He's still new to coaching but he knows the whole world of football. He's played in Italy, France, England, Spain and he has won everywhere." Such praise has substance when you consider that Morientes has played under a who's who of continental coaching: Guus Hiddink, Jupp Heynckes, Fabio Capello, John Toshack, Vicente del Bosque.

"The problem for a coach is always the same," Deschamps

explains. "You need time to adapt new players, to create an equilibrium in the team, to generate confidence and understanding, but there is never time. You also have an obligation to produce results. If a coach doesn't get results, he generally doesn't have time on his side. Unfortunately." Deschamps, now in his third season, had time enough to weed out the troublemakers, delve into the club's fertile youth policy, recruit a handful of well-chosen bargains who have all improved and piece the jigsaw together to make a skilful, ambitious and closely bonded team.

Should their financial situation not improve, just about every member of the squad would be a tempting proposition to Europe's super powers. "My young team has done very well," adds Deschamps. "They are very short on experience, but very determined. It's their first time in the Champions League and you never know how a player will feel in a new level of competition. They proved they deserve to be where they are. There was a lot of

uncertainty off the pitch but the crucial thing was to keep working well on it. I take enormous satisfaction in the way they did that."

It's a fine time to be a Monaco fan. It is a club with, as Deschamps calls it, "peculiarity" because the set-up embodies both big potential and big limitations. The atmosphere is sedate, the merchandising and money-making possibilities virtually non-existent. That said, they have still managed to produce quality teams on a regular basis.

One thing the players all say about Deschamps is that his successes as a player rub off in some way on them. But where he is clever is that he transmits his experience in a subtle way. If it's tempting to ram stories of the dressing room of the France World Cup team down their throats, he resists. "I practically never do that," he says. "I consider those times as the past. If I can use my experiences to serve them, OK, and it's useful for me. But this is their adventure, and it's a fabulous adventure." ● (© The Observer)



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



To see all the Adventures of Herojig - Tanned Man in Nepal, go to www.extreme-nepal.com

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ABOUT TOWN

EVENTS

- ❖ **Rato Matsyendranath Festival** started 23 April at Lalitpur
- ❖ **Still Life/ Street Life** Photographs by Wayne Amtzis till 3 May, poetry reading at 5PM on 2 May at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Samadhi: A journey through Sri Lanka** mixed media of Buddha images till 26 April at Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat. 4428549
- ❖ **Press Photo Exhibition** from 25-20 April at the Nepal Art Council Gallery
- ❖ **Contemporary Women Artists** at the NAFA Gallery, Naxal until 28 April.
- ❖ **The Fire Raisers** by Studio 7 at Hotel Vajra's Naga Theatre. 23,24,25 and 30 April and 1,2,3,7,8 and 9 May, Rs 700. 4410798
- ❖ **The Wheel of Life** a teaching by Lama Lundrup, 10AM on 25 April at the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. 4249270
- ❖ **ELD workshop** on writing memos, letters and minutes. 27-29 April, 4256618, eld@wlink.com.np
- ❖ **Sinners in Heaven Summer Blast** 30 April, 8PM onwards at Hotel Yak and Yeti. Rs 1,499 per person, including dinner and drinks.
- ❖ **Tantric Dances of Kathmandu** 6:30 PM 25 April at Baber Mahal Revisited
- ❖ **Ekta** premiere of a documentary on 1974 AD's 10th anniversary, live performance on 23 April, 6:15 PM Jai Nepal Cinema. 4442220
- ❖ **British Council Cyber Fair** at Lainchaur on 25 April from 10AM to 4PM. Free admission. 4410798
- ❖ **Indian Classical Music Evening** at 1905, Kantipath. 23 April, 19:05 onwards in the Amarawati Garden. Free Entry. 4225272
- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** presents Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band. Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, 4412999
- ❖ **Shanti ko Lagi Sikchya** Nepathya tours 15 locations starting 25 April. 5542646, 5552839
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's every Friday. 4479488



FOOD

- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** 6PM Wednesday and Friday. Radisson Hotel
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** Weekend BBQ at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajrayantha Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dinner at Café U** every Friday and Saturday. Patan. 5523263

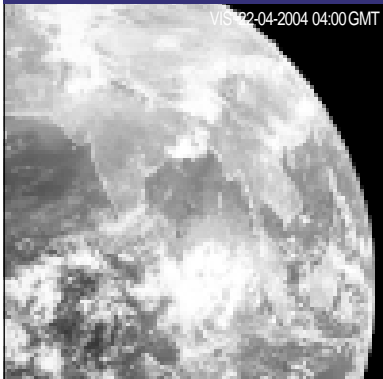
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NEPALI WEATHER



by MAUSAM BEED

The latest satellite picture shows the arrival of a sizeable westerly front over Nepal. In a dramatic move, it has gathered strength to edge away a stationary front over eastern India and Bangladesh. The infusion of moisture will continue to bring isolated showers with thunderstorms and hailstorms in the hills this weekend and early next week. As a result, mercury levels will remain in the current range. In this picture we also see the precursors of this year's southwesterly monsoon appearing of Kerala. It will be another two months before the rains get here, but it's good to see signs of things stirring in the Arabian Sea. Protesters in the valley best prepare themselves for thundery afternoon showers next week.

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BOOKWORM

The Right to Development: A Primer
Centre for Development and Human Rights
Sage Publications, 2004
Rs 632



The Right to Development (RTD), a concept that emerged in the 1970s, is one of the most debated and contentious issues in international relations. Providing a comprehensive, lucid and innovative synthesis of current thinking on RTD, this book will be of considerable interest to human rights activists, government departments and planning agencies and organisations working in development and human rights.

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

Ajay Devgan, Vivek Oberoi, Lara Dutt, Amrita Rao and Aftab star in the Indra Kumar's romantic comedy about extra-marital affairs. Marriages are supposedly made in heaven but all too often become hell on earth. *Masti* is a story of Meet, Amar and Prem who decide to spice up their lives. Only they intend to do it by having as many affairs as possible in a month and then exchanging notes—all in the name of fun, hence the name of the movie. Smacks of sexism and gender stereotypes? We'll just have to see if *Masti* redeems itself with a twist in the tale.

JAI NEPAL CINEMA



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www.jainepal.com

VACANCY

Programme Manager

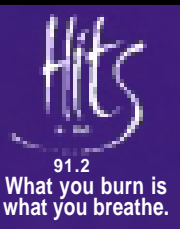
Social Science Baha, an organisation working for the advancement of the social sciences in Nepal, is looking for a Programme Manager. The position is initially open for a year, starting 1 August, 2004. The Programme Manager will be required to conduct the various activities of the Social Science Baha, including overseeing acquisitions for its library, initiating and hosting lectures, and organising workshops/conferences.

Applications are invited from graduates and post-graduates with a personal excitement about the possibilities of the social sciences for national advancement, and the creative zeal to further the aims and objectives of the Social Science Baha (see www.himalassociation.org/baha). Lack of relevant experience is not necessarily a barrier. Salary will be competitive, commensurate with individual potential and capabilities.

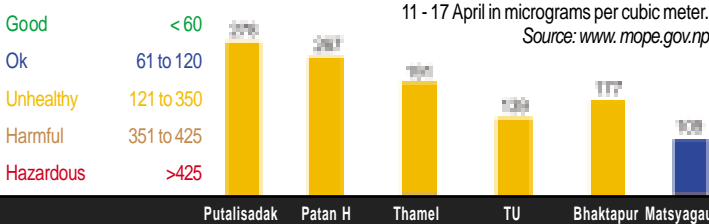
Please apply by 31 May, 2004, with CV, any relevant material, two references and a one-page presentation in English on 'The Social Sciences and Nepali Society' to:

Deepak Thapa
Social Science Baha, PO Box 166, Lalitpur, Nepal
Phone: +977-1-5542544 • Fax: +977-1-5541196
baha@himalassociation.org

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



After the remarkable improvement in air quality that we experienced, the pollution level went back to its normal highs last week. The average PM10 concentration in Putali Sadak increased by 25 percent and was more than twice the national standard for most of the week. Similarly in Thamel, the PM10 level increased by 28 percent. Most of these fine particles are a product of vehicular emissions (mainly diesel) and brick-kiln exhaust. Unless the rains arrive to flush down the pollutants, we can expect the concentration to remain high.



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HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDAY

SLINGSHOT: Student takes aim at policemen responding to an arson attack on a government vehicle in Bagh Bazar on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MEDIA BASHING: Angry reporters manhandle a policeman last Friday on Putali Sadak after their colleagues were detained.



KIRAN PANDAY

STREET KIDS: Children from the Shanti Bidya Griha in Lazimpat join older college students to shout anti-king slogans outside Amrit Science Campus on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

STREET SHOOTING: *Nepal Banda* is the name of a new music video being shot on the streets of Kathmandu during a banda on 10 April.



KIRAN SHRESTHA

AND ACTION!: The new Nepathaya music video, *Sa Karnali*, starring Thinley (of *Caravan* fame) being filmed at Phoksundo Lake in Dolpa recently.

Analogue Aavas

People who can turn their childhood passion into a successful career are the lucky ones. Musician Aavas is one of the few. Aavas taught himself how to write and read music as a young shepherd. He walked the hills on the Valley rim, playing his bamboo flute—a dreamer who preferred nature to people.



KIRAN PANDAY

As he grew older, he realised he had talent. He got in touch with musicians in Kathmandu with a leftist bent who wanted to create something other than conventional lyrics and music. Even today, Aavas prefers lyricists with revolutionary, social and cultural insights with a real feel for literature. Among his favourites are Biplob Pratik, Tirtha Shrestha and Shrawan. Inspired by great Nepali maestros like Narayan Gopal and Ambar Gurung, what sets this pony-tailed, bespectacled composer apart from a breed of new musicians is his faithfulness to Nepali musical roots.

His unique music caught the attention of European documentary makers and that led to Aavas composing several albums for German and Norwegian filmmakers, even travelling there to perform. But at the end of the day, it is back home to Nepal and its music for

Aavas. “I know it’s a risk not to go digital, yet I always wanted to experience what our past masters did,” he says. That is why his music is original, but with a traditional sound. In many respects he is an ‘old school’ musician in a digital world of multitrack recording that produces seamless perfection. He shuns technology that tweaks or otherwise changes a singer’s voice. Aavas dislikes the dehumanising effect of digitisation on something as inherently human (and thus sometimes flawed) as music. In an analogue system, everyone must come together to make music. Aavas is now poised to become a crusader—a musician set against the soullessness of digital music. To prove his point, he recently organised a live concert to demonstrate a one-take recording in front of a large audience. “I’m not against the digital system,” he clarifies. “What I dislike is that it kills the wonderful spirit of working together as real performers.” Hear, hear. ●

(Naresh Newar)

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There won't be anyone who will disagree when I state it on record here that we are on the verge of anarchy in this country as far as the use of mobile phones is concerned. We will tolerate, and indeed applaud, when a regressive vehicle from the Water Supply and Sewerage



UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

Board is ceremonially cremated, but we will never allow

handphones to be illegally used by drivers unless they (the drivers) are buckled up. What are we letting this country come to if we allow every Tom, Dick and Hari behind the wheel to make phone calls while on the road? After all:

- a) Tom has been stuck for two hours at Putali Sadak because of a julus, and the law-abiding citizen that he is, he has worn his seatbelt for the entire duration.
- b) Dick can't get through to the person he is dialling because of congestion in the Nepal Telepathy Corporation's exchange at Jawalakhel.
- c) And Hari has decided to convert his momo shop in Bag Bazar into one that sells tyres, brickbats and slingshots but he can't get to it because he's not wearing a helmet.

The world has made tremendous advances in mobile telephony, and it is now possible for your personal handset to serve not just as a phone but also as a walkman, gameboy, spy camera, rolodex, calculator, calendar, alarm clock, stopwatch, notebook, vibrator, and an infrared heat-seeking

missile. Now all that needs to be done is to ensure that the device can actually complete a call inside Kathmandu Valley. They're working on it.

It is therefore incumbent upon the royal-appointed government to immediately pass new ordinances regarding the etiquette of mobile phone usage otherwise we as a nation will face chaos and our social fabric may be torn asunder. For instance, the use of handphones must be immediately banned in public toilets because their use has been known to play havoc with the aim of those who do it standing up without lifting the seat. And in the interest of gender equality, similar strictures will soon be put into place for members of the female species as well.

The use of Sony Ericsson T630s are henceforth banned within the Pashupatinath premises because the devices are not Hindus, and also because they can be used to take snapshots of Nandi the Bull from behind. Using the Nokia 7200 in vibrator mode has also been banned with immediate effect within the Restricted Zone, and any miscreant found indulging in such disgusting activity will be nabbed by the gonads.

Because mobiles have become such versatile machines, their user guides are now as thick as the pilot's manual

for an Airbus A380. Some highlights from the 'Getting To Know Your Phone' chapter in my manual:

TROUBLESHOOTING

Problem: The phone can't be switched on.
Remedy: That is not a phone, you moron, it is a remote.

Problem: Network Busy Indicator
Remedy: Nyahahahahahaha! Tricked you again. Please try again later so we can bill you for another uncompleted call.

Problem: Infrared port doesn't work.
Remedy: Place your phone in close proximity to a Bluetooth handsfree enabled PC and allow them to exchange body fluids, you can monitor progress in graphic detail in the status bar but only if you have parental guidance.

Problem: The polyphonic melody in My Sounds doesn't autosynchronise with the user-defined template in the java-powered application drive unless the GPRS session is in progress through a voice-activated password using IMAP4 Protocol.

Remedy: Put phone on Brickbat Mode and throw.



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