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Swayambu's all-seeing eyes look down at the Royal Nepali Army's newly-recruited women soldiers

MIN BAJRACHARYA

PEACEWATCH

KUNDA DIXIT

Perhaps all is not lost if the warring sides in Nepal's conflict still talk about a negotiated solution. It means they are responding to public pressure for a new truce.

However, there is a danger this is only lip service. Also, the reward in the form of legitimacy for whoever can end the violence is so great that there is intense competition to be the peacemaker.

Just about everyone claims to have back channels open with the Maoists. The NC's Girija Prasad Koirala says he is talking, the UML says it has been in contact, palace officials have said privately their emissaries have been in touch, and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's unexplained disappearance in Bangkok led to wild speculation that he was

secretly meeting Maoists at the sidelines of the BIMST-EC Summit. Advisers hinted it was a health checkup.

Civil society reps and peace activists say they are in regular touch with the Maoists ("we don't call them, they call us") and the Maoists have used them to put out pre-conditions for a truce and talks: an agreement to discuss a constituent assembly and UN mediation. Activists note the government only needs to agree to talk about a constituent assembly, and the call for UN mediation just a way to guarantee the safety of top cadre in future talks.

On Wednesday, government spokesman and the palace's man in the Deuba cabinet, Mohamad Mohsin, summoned the Kathmandu-based

international press to say the government may be in contact with the Maoists, adding that initial talks have to be held in secret. "Things will be made public only when there is an agreement on a ceasefire," he told us. "To make talks successful we can't conduct them in a blaze of publicity."

The UML and other parties in the coalition have publicly berated their own government for dragging its feet on negotiations. The UML has staked its survival in the coalition on a truce and creating the conditions for elections. Privately, UML ministers complain that Deuba is too beholden to the army to take any unilateral peace initiative.

The UN Secretary General's special envoy, Samuel Tamarat, is in

Kathmandu this week in what is described as a "fact-finding mission to offer UN good offices".

But sources at the UN in New York told us the visit by Assistant Secretary General Kul Chandra Gautam, the highest ranking Nepali in the UN system, next week is not "on assignment" for Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Tamarat met Deuba on Thursday afternoon and his visit comes amidst signs of a softening on India's rejection of UN mediation. Before leaving Nepal as ambassador last month, Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran told media it was "up to Nepal" to decide on UN mediation.

More significantly, Saran said: "How India will deal with Nepali Maoist rebels found in India will depend on the finalisation of the extradition treaty which is being discussed between India and Nepal for amendment."

Another figure who says he is in close touch with the Maoists is former minister last year's coordinator of the government negotiation team, Narayan Singh Pun of the Samata Party.

"The Maoists have told me they are ready for talks if the state agrees to continue where it left off last August," Pun told us. "Given the authority, I can resume negotiations within one month. But I see no current moves in that direction."

Other activists say it is wishful thinking for government officials to claim they are talking to the Maoists. Said one: "As far as I know, there has been no contact at all. The two sides are still poles apart."

(With additional reporting by Navin Singh Khadka)

Timesnepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 148

Q. Do you support the government's lottery system for overseas workers?

Yes 76.8%

No 20.8%

Don't know 2.4%

Total votes:825

Weekly Internet Poll # 149. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q.If the Maoists renounce violence and free, fair elections are announced, which party will you vote for?

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القطرية

Taking you more personally



THE WRITING ON THE WALL

The post-1990 political decay in this country led to wide-spread disillusionment with democracy. Frustrated with patronage, corruption and rigged elections, the ultra left turned to armed struggle as the way out. The ultra right, still smarting from the loss of its absolute power, tried to capitalise on the mass cynicism as a way to regain lost authority. The people were not given the right to choose the middle way.

So, the October Fourth process decapitated national level parties, while the Maoists tore down an emerging culture of electoral accountability at the grassroots. Together, the left and right have taken this country back to medieval Robin Hoodland.

The first casualty of this erosion of democratic values and a tolerant, pluralistic culture has been the rule of law. It is now a free-for-all. Every individual, every group, every party is for itself. A minister who tries to control corruption in the labour export industry is hounded from all sides. The old mafia has been replaced by a new mafia. In the absence of democratic checks-and-balances, a new generation of well-connected individuals have their hands deep inside the honey pot. Besides the Maoist tax, there is this new layer of patronage that anyone who wishes to trade, invest or do business in this country has to now buy protection from. There is little room anymore for values that benefit the nation and society: like transparency, honesty, integrity and corporate social responsibility.

Eight-and-half years, and this is what the Maoist war has done to this country. It has created the conditions for a return to absolute monarchy, militarised the kingdom to a level not seen since the Anglo-Nepal wars 200 years ago, brutalised society with ruthless cruelty and snatched away from the people the civil liberties they secured in 1990.

And who benefits from this mad war? A few arms merchants and their clients in Kathmandu, plus a handful of hardline comrades spellbound by a discredited ideology. But the conflict does provide an opportunity for us to reform the structural problems in this society: the top-heavy military-monarchy combine, genuine devolution, redistribution of opportunity and restoring the people's right to electoral representation.

The people want the middle way. There is a lesson in this week's internet poll (www.nepalitimes.com) for the Maoists: at press time, nearly a quarter of the respondents were saying they would vote for the CPN-(Maoist) party if it renounced violence and took part in elections. What are you waiting for, comrades?

Wait-and-watch

The Maoists play for time while they wait out the Maoist truce in India

It has been six months since the Maoists declared that once they successfully defeat the security forces in the rest of

GUEST COLUMN
Puskar Gautam



the country, the 'people's liberation army' would enter Kathmandu. Comrade Prachanda's cadre are still determined to achieve this goal, but they are waiting to see how the ceasefire with Indian Maoists plays out.

'Because of the conduct, nature and behaviour of this government we don't see the possibility of a ceasefire at the

present time,' Prachanda said in a statement three weeks ago. There may be two reasons for this rigid stance: the Maoists now want to demolish what is left of the UML, and they don't really need to play for time to launch a major attack.

For now, they are happy enough that people like Girija Koirala have given themselves the task of single-handedly resolving the Maoist problem. Mao Zedong used to say: "Attack those in power, take advantage of the opposition." Our Maoists are employing the same strategy by letting Girija do the fighting for them—just like they did with Sher Bahadur Deuba previously.

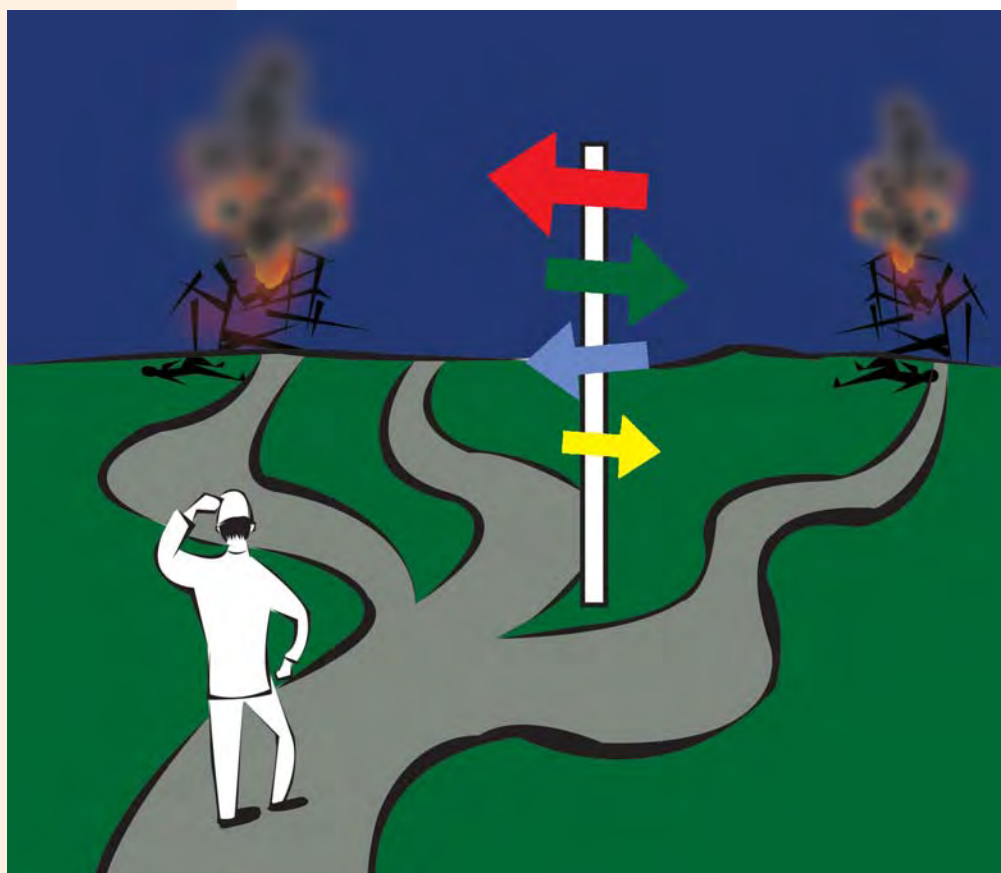
Now that the UML is on Sher

Bahadur's coat-tails, the palace has the perfect weapon to prolong the king's active role. The king has no illusions that it is the UML he has to contend with. The Maoists also know that unless they defeat the UML and Congress, they can't bring down the monarchy. After finishing off the Nepali Congress cadre at the grassroots between 1996-2000, the Maoists are now training their guns on the UML.

The palace, for its part, has propped its gun on the UML's shoulder to take aim at the Maoists and is hoping kill two birds with one bullet. The UML's slogan of restoring the truce and going for elections is just to give its membership some reason to hope. It is pretty clear in the month after this government was set up that the real players are Sher Bahadur and Mohamad Mohsin. Not Bharat Mohan Adhikari.

Militarily, the Maoists are now focusing on Kathmandu and the tarai. Its tarai 'special force' and the valley 'ring committee' (see p 13) are part of a strategy to wrest a stranglehold on the army and state and 'enter Kathmandu'.

Negotiations underway in India between state governments and the Naxalites are also the reason the Maoists have ruled out talks for now. In Andhra Pradesh, there is a ceasefire in the 30-year war and the ban on the People's War Group has been lifted. Bihar's Maoist Communist Centre and Naxalites in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi also want a ceasefire. All this bodes well for Nepal's



LETTERS

LABOUR LOTTERY

The stand taken by Minister Raghuji Pant (Internet Poll Question, #207) is commendable because it will be the first step towards curbing the illicit trade being carried out by the so-called manpower companies who are exploiting poor Nepali youth, who have gone to the extent of selling all their property to get a decent job abroad, only to be robbed by these wolves in human clothing.

DB Thapa, email

● As a contingency measure Raghuji Pant's decision to start a lottery system for jobs is a good decision. But I have strong doubts whether it will be implemented fairly since rule of law and good governance is lacking for the disadvantaged and weak Nepalis. None of the political parties have minimum

standing on their own principles and ideologies. We should be positive and to fight these looters.

Rajendra Giri, email

TRAFFICKING

There was a glaring mistake in Bernhard Lazareff's 'Kanchha's life' (#207) where he writes 'the US State department forgot to mention [Nepal] in its 4th annual Trafficking in Persons Report last month. They nailed Bangladesh, Burma, Cuba, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Venezuela, but India, Nepal and China were omitted'. I would like to

invite Lazareff to visit our website (www.nepal.usembassy.gov) on which the text of the 2004 Trafficking in Persons Report is available. The report is divided into three tiers:

Tier 1 Countries whose governments fully comply with the Act's minimum standards.

Tier 2 Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards, and: The absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing, or there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year, or the determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards

was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.

Tier 3 Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. In the current report, Nepal and China were placed on Tier 2, while India was placed on the Tier 2 Watch List. I would strongly urge Lazareff to access and read the full report so he may be better informed.

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

UNDERSTATEMENT

Reading CK Lal's 'Under-developed' (#206) and the letter ('Below the belt' #207) in response to it, I feel what Lal wrote was an understatement. Instead of an apology, Lal has provided and opportunity for all those who work for the world's poor in these institutions that have become redundant to review their positions. Let us just ask one other question: How can equitable and sustainable

development happen by perpetuating structures of inequity? In the face of such blatant irony, can anyone still be so naïve?

Name withheld

● CK Lal's last two articles about Nepal's cultural diversity (#206, #207) show that the once-taboo subject is at last beginning to attract the attention of the media. It is a fruit of the long years of struggle waged by cultural societies and ethnic groups. I remember a time when 'nationalist' journalists used to pretend that Nepal's varied cultures did not exist. I would like to request Lal to go further. Let's get down to the nitty-gritty. What exactly are the features that he recommends to make 'Nepali nationalism inclusive and democratic'?

Bhai Kaji, Kathmandu

● UN peace envoys visiting Kathmandu should read Dipta Shah's guest column in your paper before proceeding any further ('Peacemongering', #207). Like 'constituent assembly', UN-mediation has also become a code



KIRAN PANDAY

Maoists who will have easier access to safe havens across the border. They just need to wait and watch how those negotiations fare.

Nepali and Indian Maoists are part of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties of South Asia (COMPOSA), which wants to spread the ‘people’s war’ in the subcontinent. COMPOSA is wary of coordinated crackdowns by Kathmandu and New Delhi against them in both countries, and Nepali Maoists want to have a regional strategy too. For instance, our Maoists would benefit from a truce in the border regions of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The current campaign of assassinations and sabotage is only a way for the Maoists to keep themselves engaged. Killing unarmed political workers and civilians is cowardice. Even Mao had a name for that sort of thing, he called those executions the result of a “conscript mentality” and “ideological bankruptcy”.

Our Prachandistas regard themselves on a higher plane than Mao’s Maoists, and often issue statements saying ‘we will not kill political party workers and civilians’. Yet, in internal party circulars they instruct lower committees to fulfill quotas for termination of class enemies. Given the number of non-combatant deaths and civilians killed in roadside bombs and landmines, the revolution appears to have taken on the character of a criminalised war.

The reason they have backed off from a truce is because of the wait-and-see approach to what happens in India. For Prachanda to succeed in ‘entering Kathmandu’, he and his international comrades are convinced the Indian Maoist rebellion needs to be stronger as well. ●

Translated from the Nepali original in *Himal Khabarpatrika*.



The value of money depends on who you are and where you live. For the World Bank, a dollar a day is a measure of poverty. Everyone surviving on less than that falls into a category below the ‘poverty line’. Aid agencies and officials may complain about the rising cost of living in Kathmandu, but they don’t think twice about paying more than a dollar for a multinational cola.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



A section officer in HMG earns \$100 a month. Since the average family size in Nepal is more than five persons, if he conforms to the CIAA’s cleanliness criteria he has to live on less than a dollar a day.

The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, DFID, SDC and other donors want to improve the efficiency of this man in *daura suruwal* making a living on less than a dollar a

day. They want him to be honest, hardworking, sincere, responsible, accountable, transparent, answerable, accessible, cheerful, helpful, understanding and effective. And still ride the bus, eat two square meals a day, pay for outrageously expensive health services if he happens to get sick, and do it all in less than what their officers tip the waiter at lunch.

If the absolute poverty of HMG officers is scary, their relative poverty is even more terrifying. Before 1980s, they were said to be the eyes, ears, hands, legs and sometimes even minds of the rulers. This gave them a sense of power which made their pitiable circumstances somewhat tolerable. But after the government took the path of ‘structural reforms’, the mask of power fell off the bureaucrats’ faces. Overnight, government officers were transformed into adjuncts to powerful productivity advisers, efficiency consultants, austerity experts and other such minders earning

up to a thousand times more than the people they were expected to help. The morale of His Majesty’s loyal officers has never recovered since.

Since government salary is never enough to make ends meet, officers have three choices. Moonlighting is a sensible option for those who have beat the recruitment system of the government that makes it a point to hire, retain and promote only mediocre personnel. Inheritance is feasible for members of the bureaucracy whose ancestors have been far-sightedly corrupt to amass fortunes for their progenies. All others supplement their incomes with bribes simply to survive.

After his self-fulfilling prediction about the inevitable clash of civilisations, it has become academically unfashionable to quote Harvard professor Samuel Huntington. But his work on the relationship between modernisation and corruption is seminal: ‘Corruption provides immediate, specific and concrete benefits to

groups which might otherwise be thoroughly alienated from society. Corruption may thus be functional to the maintenance of political system in the same way that reform is. Corruption itself may be a substitute for reform and both corruption and reform may be substitutes for revolution. Corruption serves to reduce group pressures for policy changes, just as reform serves to reduce class pressures for structural changes.’

Donor-hired experts advising the government on administrative reform would do well to ask the basic question: is the government in a position to pay basic living expenses to its officers? If the answer is ‘no’, small changes in the day-to-day functioning of the government machinery may have more value than bulky reports on the ‘transformation’ of governance. The old adage about peanuts for monkeys applies to *hakims* too. Corruption needs to be fought at levels higher than the greasy hands pushing files to buy potatoes on the way home. ●

word for desperate Nepalis who are willing to clutch at straws for a restoration of peace. Since these two points are high on the Maoist’s agenda at the moment, Kathmandu-based peaceniks want the government to give in to the two demands so that the Maoists can be persuaded to the negotiating table. But until the Maoists show that this time they are serious about talks, and are not using it for tactical advantage, there is no reason for the government to mediate. This a determined group of revolutionaries, they will use any short-term advantage if it takes them closer to their strategic political and military goals. Besides, there is the India factor. The UN mission should also be talking to policy-makers in Delhi who are opposed to any third party mediation. Prachanda’s repeated calls for UN intervention, as Shah also points out, is only a way to gain international legitimacy. We know he knows it’s not going to happen until India wants it to happen.

T J Thapa, email

KING AND US
Re: ‘Happy Birthday’ (#204). Corruption is the abuse of public or private office for personal gain. Your paper has rightly accused the political leadership of corruption because they did enrich themselves unlawfully. But what about the increase in the royal stipend from Rs 110 million to Rs 650 million? Isn’t this also abuse of office for personal gain? I have been in Nepal for two months, and every Nepali I have met is shocked and angered by this.

Robert deFoe,
New York, USA

● Despite your paper’s criticism of Girija Prasad Koirala ‘Happy Birthday’ (#204) he is right when he says that the monarchy is as big a problem as Maoism. Other politicians must reiterate this to make the public aware of the dangers of an active monarchy.

Sucking up to the king may have made Deuba the prime minister, but does not make him a leader. History will judge by what Deuba does, not how many times

he became prime minister. What Nepal needs is a figure in political parties that can challenge both the king and the Maoists. Bringing about a significant change in the army can be a meeting ground for the political parties and the Maoist. The monarchy has never been under such threat as it is now, and that is because of the Maoists. This is a moment to seize and bring radical change and moving towards a truly democratic state.

Anand Jha, Indiana, USA

PATHETIC
When will you stop publishing Daniel Lak? How does his whining on and on about Iraq relate to poor suffering Nepalis? His pathetic hatred of everything democratic and Anglo-Saxon (‘The Anglo-Saxon disease’, #205) is getting on my nerves. I might have tolerated him if you had an antidote in your paper, but you don’t. He is so dated, like Politruk in the good ole’ Soviet Red Army. Does he own a share in Nepali Times? Do you have a contract with him which will cost you arm

and leg to break? You could start publishing Mark Steyn (www.marksteyn.com). At least he’s funny!

Robert Halak, email

CABLE WAR
Thanks for translating the story on SP Anand Ranjit’s action (‘Terrorising TV’, #206). It seems that anyone in a uniform has power to do anything. If an officer of such a high rank commits such mistakes, not just cable operators but we the citizen too, can no longer trust that uniform that is suppose to protect us. If SP Ranjit thinks that he did his job, he should first catch Nepal’s biggest cable operator for discontinuing many nice channels like AXN, HBO, CINEMAX, and replacing them with the channels that we don’t even understand while the monthly fee still remains same.

Sherap Sherpa, Maharajgunj

CHOBAR
In ‘Gorgeous Chobar’ (#207) Naresh Newar draws attention to the beautiful and historic Chobar area.

Indeed, it can be improved by renovating the Ganesh temple and ghat area and converting the cement factory into a recreational centre and resort so people can spend a few days relaxing and exploring the surrounding hills. Newar writes that the pedestrian suspension bridge was built by Scottish technicians in 1903, However, Daniel Wright in his book *History of Nepal* (page 6) puts it at 1877. During his stay in Kathmandu the British resident mentions a ‘united stream of the Bagmati and Bishnumati flows south-east, passing through a rocky ridge, which crosses the valley, by means of a deep narrow cliff, which is spanned by an iron suspension bridge, the only of the kind in the country’.

Kapil P Lohani, Dharan

CORRECTION
Prabhunayaran Basnet is not an NC politician and is not affiliated with any party as inadvertently identified in ‘Royal silence’ (From the Nepali Press, #207).

Manpower agencies and women's

Misery at home forces Nepali women domestics in the Gulf to endure abuse

JB PUN MAGAR in BHAIRAWA



Increasingly desperate Nepali women are fleeing conflict and hardship at home to work as domestics in the Gulf even though they know about the abuse and exploitation they are likely to face.

There are many levels of mistreatment: daughters pressured to leave homes to earn money, the low status of women in the family and the community, the pimps who dupe them, the border guards who need to be paid off and finally the employers in the Gulf who overwork, beat or rape them.

Three years ago, when Kani Sherpa came home in a casket from Kuwait, her suffering and death was reported widely in the Nepali media. Kani was employed as a domestic in Kuwait. She was raped and beaten almost every day, and when she finally attempted to go to the police, her employer

pushed her off a balcony. The Kuwaiti man was never tried.

Kamala Rai was also working for a family in Kuwait. She suffered multiple rapes from her employer and his friends. She fled the house and was finally sent home, traumatised and sick.

To be sure, not all Nepali women who go to the Gulf to work are abused, and conditions in Hong Kong are better (*see box*). The work is difficult and they are often homesick but they manage to send money home to their families. This is why activists lobbied three years ago to lift a ban on female migrant workers.

But as more and more women go abroad, cases of abuse have become increasingly common. Most women are aware that they may be exploited by middlemen or abused by employers, but their desperation is such that they go anyway.

"I have already spent a lot on

my daughter's passport, visa and citizenship. If I don't send her now, how I will repay my debt?" asks Lal Bahadur Tamang from Sindhupalchok whose daughter Israni was caught near Gorakhpur by volunteers with the anti-trafficking group, Maiti Nepal. This was the second time Israni was stopped on the Indian border, but Lal Bahadur is still determined to send his daughter to Kuwait.

Although it is now legal for Nepali women to work in the Gulf, they face such harassment at immigration in Kathmandu airport that most prefer to fly from India. But travelling overland to New Delhi or Mumbai exposes them to risks of being sold to brothels en route.

Many agents are actually pimps and have no intention of taking the girls to the Gulf, and sell them off in brothels in Mumbai instead. Dipa KC from

Eleven girls from Gorkha who were rescued by Maiti Nepal at the border (*above, left*). Israni and Bimala Tamang (*above right*) Sindhupalchok were turned back at the border twice, but their parents are still determined to send them to Kuwait.

Parbati KC and Agni Thapa are New Delhi-based agents for Nepalis girls who want to work as maids in the Gulf.

Pokhara and Barsha Rai from Dharan were recently rescued by an Indian activist group in Mumbai. They had been sold to a brothel owner by their Nepali recruiters, Narayan Shrestha and Gokarna Thapa.

"They think they are going to the Gulf, but most get trafficked in India," says a Nepali police officer at the Sunauli border. The police and Maiti Nepal are working to warn the girls, and send those they suspect are



ALL PICS: JB PUN MAGAR

Shock therapy

Re-electing Bush will give American politics the jolt it needs

An interesting notion is circulating in the United States. I'm not sure where it comes from. In private conversations, I've ventured it myself. Usually I've been called names. Nihilist. Trotskyite. Troublemaker. But

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



now, this idea is coming from other, much more respectable sources.

It goes like this: in this year's US presidential election, the most desirable outcome for those who believe in long-term, meaningful change is the re-election of George W Bush. That's why I get called the names. Most of my friends are what Americans call "liberals" or "leftists". I'd say, for the most part, they are actually middle class people with a conscience.

Anyway, to such people, whether Americans, Britons or South Asians,

another four years of robber baron economics and piracy as foreign policy is anathema.

I've got a different point of view. I say we need more of the extremism and neo-Imperialism of George Bush. Four years might be too much but that's what we're stuck with, thanks to the American political system. But why, oh why, you might ask, do we need more Bush?

Well, it's simple. American politics needs a jolt. It's quite simply too comfortable, too close to big money, too unwilling to engage with issues of class, race and poverty at home and religious zealotry and corporate malpractise abroad. That includes Republicans and Democrats. It really doesn't matter which party is in the White House. It's been that way ever since Ronald Reagan shifted the political goal posts in his country into ground once occupied only by extremists and reclusive multi-millionaires—the far right.

To bring the goalposts back, the Democrats need to change. They need to abandon big money and the centrism championed by Bill Clinton whose noteworthy achievement in office in the 1990s were to push millions of poor people off welfare in order to balance the national budget. The party needs to return to its roots as representative of the American poor, not its enemy. The party needs to oppose corporate interests, not beg them for campaign funds. The party needs to lead the debate on reform in American, not stifle it.

So who else thinks this way? Who else is wondering whether four more years of the ineptness and arrogance of the current American government might be the way to discredit the current neo-conservative right and its cheerleaders in the media? American's biggest trade union for one, the Service Employees International Union. The leader,

Andrew Stern, told the Washington Post last week that he would be voting for John Kerry in the next election, but hoping for the re-election of George Bush.

Stern is one of many people working for a re-alignment of the left in America. Not all of them are traditional lefties either. Among them is George Soros, the billionaire speculator, and a number of New Technology millionaires from the Silicon Valley. Other union leaders and academics also think this way.

It's not that they're urging people to vote for Mr Bush. It's more that they're genuinely interested in real change on their own side of the political spectrum. And they think that shock therapy—four more years in the political wilderness, four more years that could cause international havoc—might just be the way ahead.

We live, I daresay, in interesting times. ●



ALL PICS: SHARAD KC

Wounded in action

Four months after they were injured in an army helicopter attack, young boys and old women are still fending for themselves

SHARAD KC in ACHHAM



Eight-year-old Bed Raj Timilsina ran out of his family's home in the village of Binayak in Achham when he heard the sound of the helicopter.

He headed to the school where there was a Maoist meeting going on. Suddenly, the ground around him erupted in explosions of dust. The helicopter had opened fire with its pod-mounted guns and Bed Raj got two shells in his legs.

Nara Bahadur Khadayat lives near the school, and his 11-year-old son, Netra Bahadur, also ran out when he heard the helicopter. He got a direct hit to the chest. Nara Bahadur weeps inconsolably remembering that day four months ago, the wounds of bereavement still fresh in his heart: "I had spoken to my son half an hour before, and I found him dead in a pool of blood."

Nara Bahadur Sodari is from Kalagaun and saw puffs of smoke from the helicopter and bullets hitting the houses and the ground. He saw two of his friends die in front of his eyes.

Six people were killed and dozens injured on 12 April in the aerial attack on the Maoist meeting at the Binayak school

ground. The Maoists used the incident to highlight the army's indiscriminate firing, while downplaying the fact that they had organised a meeting in the school.

Although none of the Maoists at that meeting were armed, many villagers say they were pressured to attend. Farmers here have learnt to do what the local Maoists tell them to, and know what happens to those who don't.

Bed Raj's father, Tika Ram Timilsina doesn't even know he is eligible for government compensation for his son's treatment. He has spent Rs 130,000 taking his son to Nepalganj for treatment. "I sold my farm, I sold my buffaloes, I sold my wife's ornaments and I am still Rs 55,000 in debt," Tika Ram tells us. Netra Bahadur's father, Nara Bahadur hasn't received any compensation for his son's death. He knows it was an army helicopter that killed his son, but he doesn't even know where to start asking.

On 21 July, the Maoists had a much larger meeting than the one in April in the same school ground. This time they were heavily armed. A helicopter appeared again, circled thrice and, on the third



turn, started firing. Urmila Debi Neupane and her friends screamed and started running for cover. The army says it was firing to warn the Maoists, and was careful not to repeat the mistake it made in April (*See 'Gunmen', #207*). The Maoist military commander in Binayak boasted that the army was scared away by their long-range weapons, which could have shot down the helicopter if it came within range.

For Urmila Debi, it doesn't matter who scared whom away. She just remembers the sight of one of the participants at the gathering in the school in April losing grasp of her six-month-old son as she ran for cover. The baby fell in the dust and was hurt. She shakes her head: "What bad luck this village has, all they do is shoot at us." ●

Clockwise from top, left:

Bed Raj Timilsina was hit by two bullets, his father has spent all his savings on his son.

The Binayak Secondary School in Achham, which has suffered two helicopter attacks on Maoist meetings held there, once in April and again last month.

Village women, some nursing babies, were made to attend the meeting at Binayak announcing the Maoist 'unified command' on 12 July.

Nara Bahadur Sodari and his friends, who saw friends killed in the helicopter attack in April.

A woman cleaning her pots watches the newly-formed village militia drill with mock wooden rifles at the school ground.

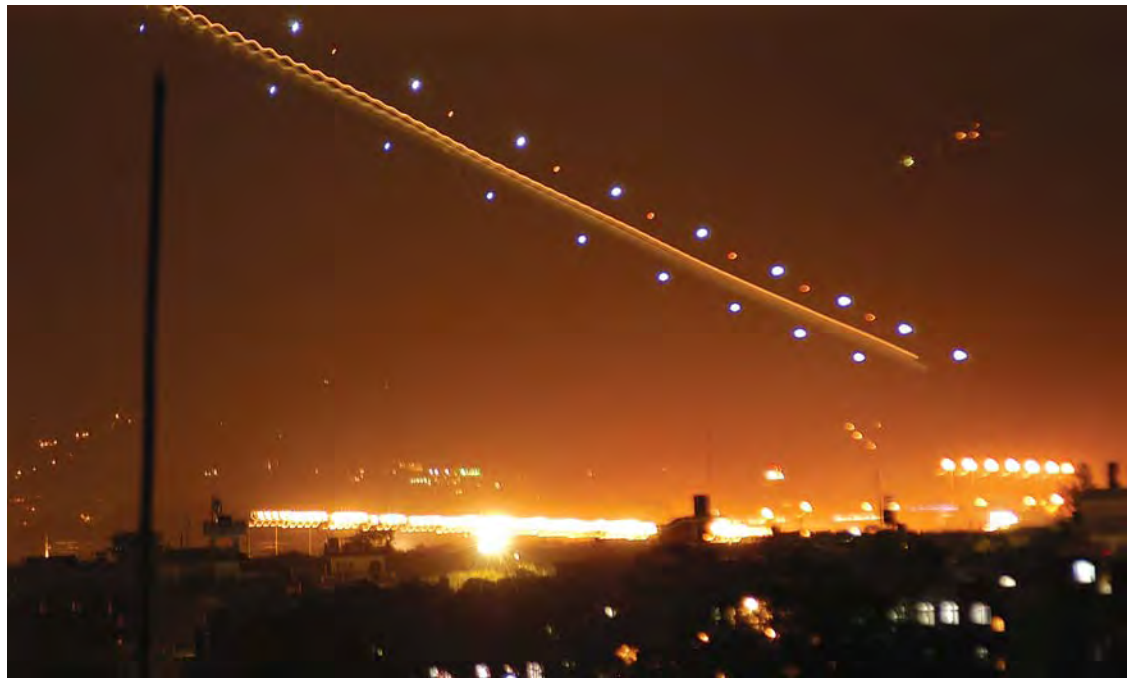
Urmila Debi Neupane lives near the school and witnessed both helicopter attacks.

Nara Bahadur Khadayat grieves for his 11-year-old son, Netra Bahadur, who was killed in the air raid in April.



Wakey, wakey

Late-night jet takeoffs cause an epidemic of sleep deprivation in Kathmandu Valley



MIN BAJRACHARYA

MRINMOY MAJUMDER

Home after a hard day at work, you have just fallen into a deep sleep. Suddenly, there is a mighty roar, the windows rattle and the building shakes. You are rudely woken up by a jet taking off from Kathmandu airport. You toss and turn fitfully all night and are a wreck at work the next morning.

As Kathmandu airport is swamped by urban sprawl, more and more families are forced to live directly under the flight path of aircrafts landing and taking off.

So far, the capital's citizens have been mainly worried about air and water pollution. But increasingly, noise from street traffic and aircraft are becoming a concern. Noise pollution can be of two types: a single unprotected short-range exposure that can cause permanent hearing loss, or long-term exposure to less intense sounds. Both are harmful to health.

It is exposure to longterm noise at night that has causes indirect harm because of sleep deprivation. Most airports around the world have flight curfews at night and new airports are now being located on landfills out at sea.

Although advances in jet engine technology has reduced their noise in recent years, a twin-engine jet taking off still emits 150dBA directly under its flight path. Research has shown that is enough to disturb sleep, make the hair on the back of the neck stand up and raise blood pressure.

Kathmandu airport has a noise problem even in the daytime because of the Valley's bowl-shaped topography: this amplifies the sound and prolongs the echo. Planes also have to climb on maximum power to get over the surrounding mountains and options for standard departure that could avoid built-up areas are limited.

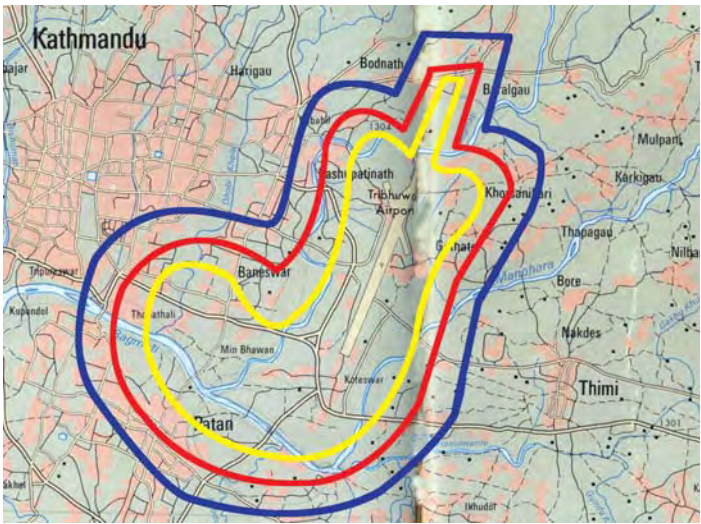
In addition, as winter approaches, poor visibility till noon means most flights are bunched up in the afternoon or night. The increase in flight frequency of low-flying military helicopters has made the problem worse. Most domestic carriers operate relatively quiet turbo-props and are not much of a nuisance. The biggest window rattlers are the F-28s operated by Bangladesh Biman. Although a small aircraft, it is powered by older model rear-mounted turbfans. Thankfully, it has an

afternoon departure.

However, the four-engine Airbus 340s operated by Austrian Airlines and its Friday morning 2AM takeoff is a sleep spoiler not just for those living near the airport but for people right across the Valley. The fully-tanked 340 on a nine-hour flight to Vienna has a slower rate of climb and makes two orbits over the airport before heading off. The flights have been suspended for the off season and are due to restart in mid-September. Royal Nepal Airlines' 757s are less noisy but become a major headache when schedules are disrupted and they take off at ungodly hours, waking everyone up.

"My son gets up every night, and this means loss of sleep for the whole family," says Uday Khanal, a physics teacher who lives in Baneswor. It is much worse for Bina Dhakal in Lokanthali who is directly under the flight path of jets taking off, and says she suffers from partial hearing loss due to longterm exposure to jet noise. Even as far away as Sanepa, residents complain that midnight takeoffs disturb their sleep.

It is difficult to quantify the cost of aircraft noise in dollars



Estimated decibel contour of a west-bound 757 on takeoff from Kathmandu airport. Most of the noise is felt in Chabahil, Baneswor, and Patan.

150 dBA 130 dBA 90 dBA

How loud is too loud?

Continued exposure to noise above 85dBA over time will cause hearing loss. To know if a sound is loud enough to damage your ears, it is important to know both the loudness level (measured in decibels, dBA) and the length of exposure to the sound. The harm grows exponentially. For example, the human ear can tolerate 85dBA for 8 hours before it gives up. At 110dBA, the maximum exposure time is 1 minute 29 seconds. Noise levels above 140dBA can cause damage to hearing after just one exposure, for example, to a bomb explosion.

The following are decibel levels (dBA) of common noise sources:

- 0 The softest sound a person can hear
- 10 Normal breathing
- 40 Quiet office, library
- 95 Traffic at Putali Sadak
- 120 Disco, thunderstorm
- 150 737-300 on take off at runway threshold
- 180 Rocket launch from pad

and cents. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study six years ago identified four categories of impact from noise pollution: productivity losses due to poor concentration, communication difficulties or fatigue due to insufficient rest and health complications caused by lack of sleep. Aircraft noise also lowers real estate property value.

A study of Kathmandu conducted by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) back in 1989 had warned that air traffic growth at Kathmandu airport could present longterm noise hazard concerns. As residential areas grow around the airport and under the flight path, the problem is bound to get worse.

"We are aware of the problem, but there is sometimes no alternative but to have night flights," says BB Adhikari at the Civil Aviation Authority of

Nepal (CAAN). Indeed, if a night curfew is imposed, Kathmandu airport would be open for only six hours in winter. Imposing a 'noise tax' on large planes taking off at night is also ruled out because Kathmandu's landing charges and handling fees are already one of the highest in the world.

"The present extent of the noise problem doesn't warrant investing in noise-monitoring equipment because it is too expensive," says Binod Gautam at CAAN. Privately, officials admit that there just isn't enough of a public outcry yet to warrant such expense.

True, the problem of the occasional noisy jet probably pales in comparison to other woes: the lack of water, garbage and traffic. But one thing is certain: Kathmandu's aircraft noise problem is bound to get worse before it gets better. ●

mrinmoy_m@SIFY.com

ROYAL DANISH EMBASSY Neel Saraswati Marg, Lazimpat.

SALE OF TOYOTA LAND CRUISER STATION WAGON GX, DIESEL

The Royal Danish Embassy, Kathmandu hereby invites sealed bids for the sale of the above vehicle on "WHERE-IS-AS-IS" basis. The station wagon was imported duty free in December 1996.

Vehicle I	
Technical Description	: Diesel driven, 5 gears, power steering, with air-conditioner, 8 seats, 5 doors.
Colour	: White
Displacement	: 4164 cc
Mileage done	: 63758 km

The above station wagon can be inspected at the Embassy premises from **Monday, 09 August 2004**, to **Thursday, 12 August 2004**, between **1000 hours** and **1200 hours**.

The bid form will be available at the Embassy's Reception Desk on **Thursday, 12 August 2004**, from **1000 hours** to **1200 hours**.

The sealed bids must reach the Royal Danish Embassy not later than **Friday, 13 August 2004** by **1200 hours**. Notification of the successful bidder will be posted on the Embassy's Notice Board on **Wednesday, 18 August 2004** at **1000 hours**. The successful bidder must make full payment of the quoted amount within **two days** of said notice.

The successful bidder must submit the duty paid receipt from the Customs Office, HMG/Nepal, prior to the release of the station wagon. The Royal Danish Embassy reserves the right to accept or reject any bid without assigning any reason thereof.



ELD News

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War is bad for health

The health of the people of Rukum reflects the health of the nation



ALL PICS: RAVI TULADHAR



KISHORE NEPAL in SALLE

To understand how badly the conflict is affecting the health of Nepalis, a visit to this rudimentary 15-bed hospital, the only government-run facility in the remote district of Rukum in mid-western Nepal, is enough.

Inadequately-funded, understaffed and caught between the guerrillas and the soldiers, hospital staff struggle to do the best they can to cope with help from an international charity group. Some patients are direct victims of conflict, wounded by explosives or bullets, but thousands of others are indirectly affected by under-nourishment, a lack of vaccines and unsafe drinking water. Then there are the thousands who are still beyond the reach of basic health care.

Even before the conflict flared up here eight years ago, this rugged and roadless district, with a peacetime population of 250,000, was among those with the worst health and education statistics in the kingdom. Massive numbers of young men and women have left, and life for the very young and very old who remained behind in the remote outlying hamlets is much worse than before.

The conflict here has forced hospital staff to adhere to medical ethics, and they never disclose the identity of a patient. So far, they have been left alone by both warring sides. Yet the facilities are woefully inadequate. Right now, there is a

diarrhoea epidemic, frequent measles outbreaks kill children and skin diseases and other infections are rampant. There has been a marked rise in sexually transmitted diseases—of the 57 blood samples collected recently, 16 tested positive for STDs, two had hepatitis B and two were HIV positive.

Currently, the hospital is the node for polio, measles and other vaccination campaigns in the district. “We don’t face any interference from the Maoists, they leave us alone,” says Bhabani Sharma, an ayurvedic doctor who heads the Rukum Hospital. The Maoists only seem worried about the army’s own occasional field health camps.

However, the rebels take away up to half the medical supplies, especially first aid material, sent to outlying health posts. Health workers don’t use the word ‘loot’ because they say the Maoists also organise health camps just like the army does and some of the supplies are used to treat the population. And since only the Maoists can go into the interior of the district, they are actually taking health care to the villages.

There are still some health workers left in the surrounding VDCs, and they have what they call “a special adjustment” with the Maoists. “They don’t come to our health post, but they are always watching us, we can’t really do much without their approval,” says a health worker

from Taksera village. The Maoists seem to be better equipped than the health posts, and take care of their wounded and sick. For major war wounds, they carry patients to Chaurjhari, or even across the mountains to India.

Most health posts don’t have personnel, and some health workers in others have gone over to the rebels. Impressed by what they saw as the dedication of the Maoists, two auxiliary health workers, Krishna Regmi of Rukumkot and Lokendra Dangi of Arma sub-health post joined the Maoist last year. Regmi was a permanent government civil servant.

“Maoist medics are better equipped and they have good doctors,” says Shiba Narayan Rajak, a senior health worker in Rukum. The hospital at Rukum is getting vital help from the France-based charity, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which looks after the tuberculosis and pathology units and provides extensive care for the people of Musikot. MSF also provides food and some medial supplies to patients. However, the organisation hasn’t been allowed to operate freely in the surrounding villages.

The hospital was set up 16 years ago and has a lab and x-ray unit which treats some 75 patients every day. The 15 beds are always packed, and there is always a waiting list as each patient stays an average of one week. ●

Mixing oil and conservation

Environmental groups are worried Nepal’s achievements in conservation of tarai national parks and the rescue of the tiger and rhino from the verge of extinction will be jeopardised by habitat destruction caused by oil exploration in the region.

Within a month of coming to power, the Deuba government allowed the British group, Cairn Energy to explore for oil in the tarai under the Petroleum Exploration Project. The Department of Mines and Geology is expected to sign an agreement soon. (See also: ‘Tarai crude’ #182)

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is worried that the planned exploration in the Chure hills and in the tarai of central and western Nepal will set back its plans for a cross-border Tarai Arc Landscape Project to link national parks in Nepal and India through protected jungle corridors.

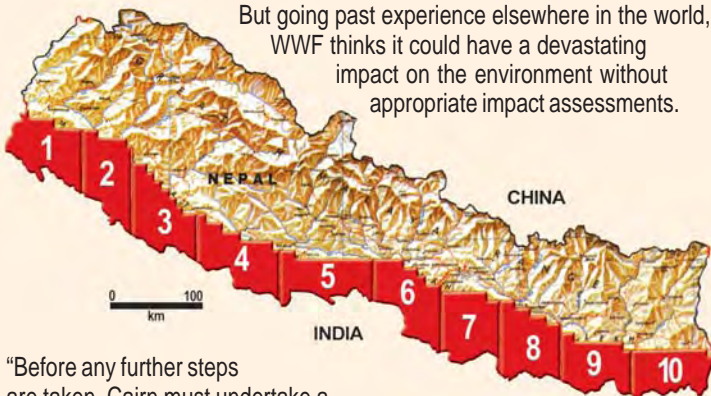
“At this stage, WWF in Nepal has not been informed about the company’s plans to look for oil and gas there, and it is vital that any oil exploration in such a delicate environment is undertaken in partnership with WWF, local communities and other stakeholders,” the Nepal office of WWF stated.

But going past experience elsewhere in the world, WWF thinks it could have a devastating impact on the environment without appropriate impact assessments.

“Before any further steps are taken, Cairn must undertake a strategic environmental assessment (SEA), which allows the public, in particular the people of Nepal, and conservation organisations like WWF, to clearly see what that impact may be.”

Officials of Cairn Energy were in Kathmandu recently to pay a courtesy call on the government and thank it for the exploration permission. The company is involved in exploration in India and Bangladesh as well. Officials at the Department of Mines and Geology told us Cairn Energy plans to invest \$60 million during exploration in the next few years and would pay \$250,000 as royalty to the government every year.

The government is happy about Cairn Energy’s interest because no international company had responded to its tender calls for petroleum exploration in recent years. The American firm, Texana, had been prospecting near Nepalganj since 1998, but left after the government declared a state of emergency two years ago. The first exploration permission was given to a French company in 1979, but it didn’t find enough deposits to merit extraction.



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मेट्रो
एफ एम
९४.६

Rolling on the railroad

Landlocked Nepal gets smoother, faster access to the sea



CHINPAL RAUNIYAR



KANAK MANI DIXIT

On the afternoon of 16 July an Indian Railways goods train carrying 74 containers full of maize for the UN's World Food Program slipped into the Sirsiya-Birgunj Internal Clearance Depot (SBICD). The arrival of 1,308 metric tons of cargo was a momentous occasion for Nepali trade and commerce. However, the ceremony, where the Secretary of Industry, Commerce and Supplies Dinesh Chandra Pyakural welcomed the Indian Railways rake into Nepal's first dry port, was overtaken by news of the budget, announced on the same day.

It had been a long time coming for this Rs 760 million World Bank-funded depot which was completed in December 2002. Nepal did not have the requisite laws to govern the operation of trains, and the application of Indian laws raised a risk of extra-territoriality which made politicians hesitant.

Just-departed Indian ambassador, Shyam Saran, went all-out for the project, and Nepali bureaucrats found the appropriate terminology in the agreement to get the terminal operational. The breakthrough was a reference to 'applicable laws' of the two countries which would govern the entry of Indian Railways trains 5.4km from Raxaul railway station and

400m into Nepal past the border point and bridge over the Sirsiya rivulet. A Nepali Railways Act is now awaiting action by the Deuba cabinet.

Spread over 16 hectares, the dry port has 7,105sq m of bonded warehouse and storage space for 1,600 containers. The soft opening of the SBICD is also to allow testing of the tracks and equipment which have lain unused for three years. The formal inauguration is expected sometime in the autumn, with the Bihar strongman and presently India's Railway Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav expected to be present.

The immediate benefit from the dry port is that it allows arrival of third-country goods via sealed container straight into Nepali territory without opening the cargo in Kolkata Port. The goods will now pass through Kolkata in sealed containers, with port officials just carrying out customary checks to ensure the seals have not been broken.

Documents such as bills of lading and invoices will no longer be required, and only copies need be provided 'for information', according to Himalayan Terminals, the company which runs the dry port. Once a ship arrives in Kolkata, containers in the Nepal-bound sub-manifest are simply marked for transshipment. The Indian

Railways transport the containers to Sirsiya-Birganj, including the passage through Raxaul customs.

"We are expecting the savings in transit and transport costs between Kolkata and Birganj to be between 30-40 percent, plus the benefit from simplified paperwork and streamlined procedures will be immense," says Secretary Pyakural. An official estimate has it that Nepal will save \$16.2 million a year by using railway instead of trucks from Kolkata.

Himalayan Terminals has the contract for ten years and is a joint venture between the parastatals Container Corporation of India (Concor) and the Nepal Transit and Warehousing Company, with the private Interstate Multimodal Transport run by the Rauniar family of Tahachal, a company with long experience in handling bulk and high-value cargo.

The biggest losers from the dry port's activation will be Indian truckers who handled transport from Kolkata port to points in Nepal. Indeed, even as the inaugural train was flagged off at the Netaji Subhas Dock on 12 July by Nepal's Consul General Yubaraj Bhusal, Kolkata-based truck operators were petitioning the West Bengal government against Concor for having initiated the

container service. The loss to Indian truckers is a bonanza for Nepali transporters if they can augment their fleet of flatbed trucks required for containers.

Says Ras Bihari Rauniar, the Nepali partner in Himalayan Terminals: "There is not one aspect of the national economy that will not benefit by the efficiency and costs-savings from the clearance depot."

The dry port has opened up the tantalising prospect, finally, of Nepal's rail connectivity to the entire broad gauge system that crisscrosses the subcontinent, the biggest network in the world. While the present use of the Sirsiya-Birganj ICD is limited to the Kolkata and Haldia ports, there is little to stop Nepal from seeking access to other ports in India through the broad gauge network, or to the Bangladesh ports of Mongla or Chittagong via the Rohanpur-Singhabad frontier of West Bengal. Both Chittagong and Mongla ports have offered 50 percent discount in services in order to attract Nepali business.

Himalayan Terminals is now working to coordinate track timings with Indian Railways to provide fixed departure and arrival times. Initially, it says the plan is for two trains a week from Kolkata and one train a week from Haldia. The time for cargo to arrive from seaport to dry

port once bottlenecks are cleared will be less than 48 hours, say officials.

The dry port will not by itself bring prosperity to Nepal. The country can take full advantage of containerised trade when it is able to export in bulk in the same way that it imports in bulk. This will require Nepali traders to evolve into producers of goods rather than exporters of repackaged third-country imports.

Business and government must collaborate in taking advantage of the link now available to the rest of the subcontinent. One can plan on extending the line to Bangladesh and even to cargo links to Pakistan via rail across the Wagah-Atari frontier. But before all that, India beckons.

There are also other points to ponder as we look towards an expanded economy through the dry port at Birganj-Sirsiya. Economist Posh Raj Pandey says there is urgent need to promote exports of the kind that would travel by rail, and ensure that the appropriate kinds of agreements are in place with India for this. At the same time, he cautions, "We must not fail to consider regional imbalances that may occur within Nepal if Birganj-Sirsiya is the only point with broad gauge and a dry port." ●

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FEEL THE MANDALA TOUCH

BIZ NEWS

Decline in Indian passengers

Nepal's visitors by air in July 2004 showed an increase of only one percent compared to the same period last year. This week's NTB figures show 18 percent more non-Indian visitors than last year, but this was offset by a 16 percent decline in Indian arrivals. This could be because of irregular Royal Nepal Airlines flights to Indian destinations. The drop comes despite the new daily Jet Airways flights from Delhi. Another reason could be aggressive promotion of the southeast Asian markets for Indian upper middle class, travel trade sources say. Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have been selling Indians cheap holiday and shopping packages.

European arrivals by air have shot up, with much of the growth among British (+17 percent), French (+21 percent), Spanish (+97 percent), Italian (+76 percent) and Dutch (+61 percent) tourists. Canadians are also up by 30 percent from last year. Japan showed only six percent growth, while Chinese travelers went up by 57 percent. The Indian share of passenger volume dropped to 40 percent of the total in July. Air travel was still down 24 percent from the highs recorded in July 1999.

Trendy Olympians




Roots Fashion, the authorised dealer for Adidas in Nepal, have made a sporting contribution to Nepal's Olympic hopefuls. The five athletes heading for the Athens Olympics were given equipment worth Rs 80,000, which included sportswear at a program on 1 August.

Washing up

Shoppers at Bluebird department store, Tripureswor will be getting a little more than they bargained for as Sagtani Exim puts on demonstrations of IFB brand washing machines and dryers. They'll get to see the machines in action, which apparently go easy on water, require less detergent and electricity and have a unique front load system.

Noodle lottery



Asian Thai Foods, manufacturers of Rum Pum and 2pm Noodles and Krazy Cheeseballs, has come up with another scheme to make eating noodles more interesting. Following the success of the '2pm Jackpot' offer, this one is called '1 2 ko 4 Jhadka'. Each Rum Pum pack contains a single scratch coupon with three windows. The first has a number displayed, and scratching away the coating on the second will reveal a calculation sign. Scratching the third window yields another number, and then you do a little math, and voila, you could end up a winner of up to Rs 500,000.


Beam Steak

What the Bay of Bengal Initiative should mean for Nepal

Now that BIMST-EC has been rechristened Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, it may have an even more unwieldy acronym.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed



Nepal never misses out an opportunity to sign international or regional agreements, especially as it opens new vistas for foreign junkets. This time, the prime minister refused to fly the national airline and went AWOL in Asia's fleshpot for three days.

Nepal is committing to more open regional cooperation, when back home on the ranch, the stock exchange staff just finished another round of strikes. We are seeking to open investments when stockbrokers are fighting to undercut each other for brokering commissions.

With WTO, Nepal did have enough support and time for preparation and so put up a good case. A laundry list of changes in legislation has been drawn up, and someday it will be enacted. In comparison, even people in the government were not sure about what kind of organism this BIMST-EC thing is. Other countries in the Bay of

Bengal periphery seem similarly flummoxed. Apart from in Thailand, the summit got little press anywhere.

The Beed, however, understands that the agreement is a step ahead of even SAFTA and WTO. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand are really looking at opening up their economies. While WTO is focused on trade and SAFTA does take into consideration trade and services, BIMST-EC goes a step further in opening up investments too.

Trade Area or implement a BIMST-EC visa.

For Nepal, this is an opportunity to kick start investment. An outside push has always been necessary to create the right laws or institutional framework in Nepal. But private sector preparedness to face an onslaught of reforms is still poor. In the past, the private sector has been more obsessed with pushing protectionism than self-reform. Thai products have lower cost of production and economies of scale, Indian telecom and banking services are comparable to the best in the world, Sri Lankan tea has really captured global markets, Bangladesh garments have the lowest cost in the region and Myanmar has an abundance of natural resources. What does Nepal have to offer apart from a swelling workforce?

We will see a few more conferences and workshops, parachute consultants will descend upon us in the coming months to share experiences of Botswana or Ecuador. And our apex private sector bodies will try to rope in some donor assistance to understand the impact of what all this will have on us. The crux, however, will lie in taking advantage of the free trade agreement and this time the private sector should take the lead. ●



Great. So, our laws should allow a Thailand bank to operate in Nepal as well as Nepali banks to invest in India or Sri Lanka. If one reads between the lines of the charter documents and agreements, there are very few things the member countries will not be able to do. We can eliminate tariffs in the Free



KIRAN PANDAY

Lavanya Rastogi is the CEO of Value One, an integrated value chain multinational involved in consulting, outsourcing, technology and systems integration. It recently established office in Nepal, its 14th. Rastogi talks to *Nepali Times* about what attracted the company to Nepal and the challenges it faces here.

“This is where you are, and this is where you want to be.”

What does Value One actually do?
Value One's vision is simple. We deliver world class technology solutions with end-to-end delivery capabilities, spanning telecommunications, and the education, government and NGO sectors. We have over 250,000 users globally, and we are one of the few companies worldwide which acts at all levels of the value chain whether in R&D, services, next level of the product, technology, consulting, systems integration and training.

But why Nepal?
We look at Nepal as a beautiful tourist destination, never as a business destination. The Nepal market is just getting started, so business opportunities here are great. There is the right amount of raw talent but there are no local service suppliers. We can use IT for the progress of the country, not only as a tool to help businesses but also as a business itself.

To give a concrete example...
For example, RNAC might want to have a web-based customer-to-management relation, but they don't have a company that will offer them the right management solution to do that. Most of the IT companies here work excellently for small projects, but can't support projects like completely automating your provident fund department.

So what are the challenges Nepali businesses face?
It's complicated. We found good entrepreneurs, but they lack the longterm experience and vision to drive Nepal towards greater exposure and IT usage. They all agree IT is important, but they are lagging behind. The companies that tried to take the leadership advantage didn't have proper vendors, so they failed, burning their fingers. Now they're scared to try it again.

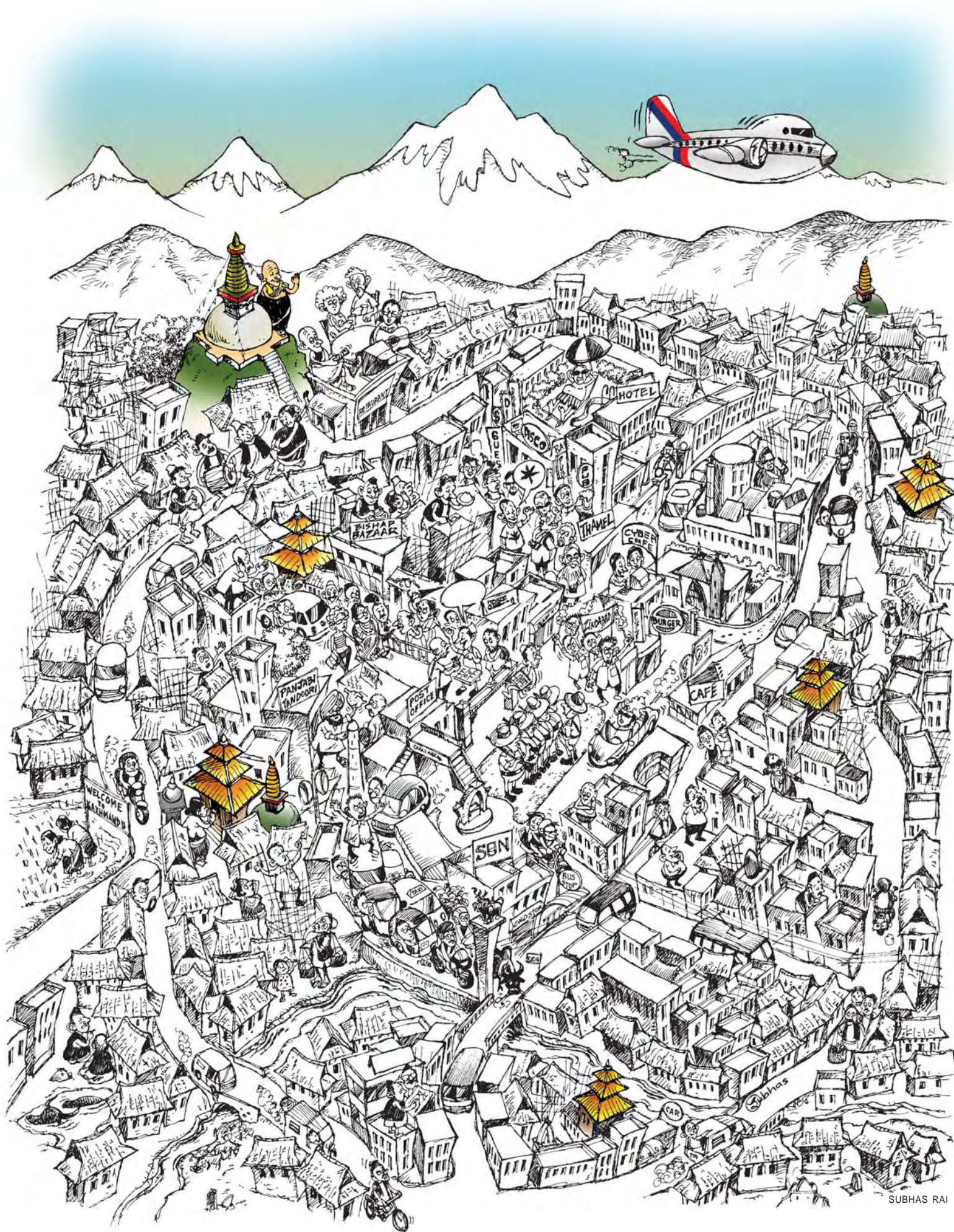
How do you intend to approach this?
We want to adopt the preferred partner approach. We want to

help organisations at different levels of maturity in adapting the IT systems realise what they can do with IT. We are initially working with banks, educational institutions, service sector companies, helping them be more competitive and improve the quality of their services through IT. We tell our clients two things: this is where you are, this is where you want to be.

Other obstacles?
There are three primary challenges. First, the approach of Nepali business organisations is still a private owner driven approach, not a professional managed approach. Second, they've tried to adapt IT and had bad experiences in the past. Their impression is IT does not work and computerisation is very difficult and expensive. Third, is the availability of good technical manpower.

How do you solve these problems?
We're not only looking at Nepal as an opportunity. We're looking at Nepal as a responsibility to help people see what is possible if they adapt technology. We want to give people the exposure of competition and offer to hold their hand through it.

Doesn't that create dependency?
Yes. Hand holding can sometimes create a permanent dependency so systems only work if we're around. But we need to create three types of capabilities in organisations. One is process capability where ad hoc systems are streamlined. Processes are documented, people are trained in processes to follow to improve their work efficiencies. Second is to build people capability of accountants, clerk, customer service reps, managers, auditors, teachers educated in IT fundamentals. Third, is to create the IT systems capability. Finally, we do it all within a timeframe and hand over the system.



Kathmandu Valley and Lumbini could be de-listed if heritage destruction is not stopped

Saving what's left

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Kathmandu Valley's precious architectural heritage has been in danger ever since urban sprawl intruded upon its sacred spaces.

The encroachment is horizontal as the city spreads and overwhelms historical sites, and also vertical as new buildings defy height limits to dwarf temples and bahals. Although there has been a renaissance of traditional

architecture in parts of Patan and Bhaktapur, the general trend is still one of erosion of Kathmandu's unique urban landscape.

The Valley was recognised as a World Heritage Site in 1979 by Unesco (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and it set aside seven sites: the three Durbar Squares at Hanuman Dhoka, Mangal Bazar and Bhaktapur, the stupas of Boudha and Swoyambhu and the

temples of Pashupati and Changu Narayan. Outside the Valley, Unesco also declared Lumbini a sacred site that needed protection.

Despite warnings, however, migration pressure and the effects of modernisation are just too relentless for government conservation agencies and the municipality to stop the erosion of Kathmandu Valley's architectural heritage. Saving Kathmandu's heritage needs more than just enforcing

existing zoning laws and building parameters. It needs a revival of the ancient guthis and a new consciousness among individuals to value their heritage.

As a warning, Unesco last year put Kathmandu Valley's monument zones on the 'endangered list', which was a major embarrassment for the government. Now, it looks like Lumbini may follow suit for unchecked construction around the Maya Debi temple.

Being de-listed from the bill of Unesco's World Heritage Sites could be a disaster for Nepal's tourism industry. And even though officials involved in conservation have been sounding the alarm bells, inappropriate construction is still causing problems. Nepal's oldest Buddhist sites, the 2,500-year-old Ashoka chaityas in Patan, have been obliterated by surrounding buildings. An overhead bridge is coming up in front of the Pulchok stupa, built by the very municipality that is supposed to conserve heritage and a new building is under construction near the Lagankhel stupa.

"Unesco has reason to be concerned and warn that they will de-list us when they see such construction," says Keshab Jha, who served as ambassador in Paris and represented Nepal at Unesco.

In 1992, Unesco gave the government a 55-point recommendation that included pedestrianisation of the city core, removing electricity transformers and enforcing vertical limits on construction. "In a recent review, we found that 90 percent of the recommendations have been followed," says Ukesh Raj Bhuju of the Nepal Heritage Society. "But construction around the heritage sites remains the main challenge."

But it is not just the government that is to blame. Unesco experts have often come up with contradictory statements and there has been a tendency to put down Nepali expertise. When the Pratapur Temple on Swoyambhu collapsed last year, a Unesco expert wrote back to Paris saying he doubted that the Nepalis could rebuild it, yet it was rebuilt within a year with local resources.

Lumbini is a prime example where Unesco experts have come up with contradictory and confusing recommendations. There is no doubt that Buddhist countries are competing with each other to build monolithic monasteries and temples in the masterplan area, and the construction at the nativity site itself could have been done with more sensitivity.

After the excavation at the Maya Debi temple site was finished, plans to restore the temple got bogged down in design disputes between experts for eight years. Officials say a series of Unesco experts gave different and baffling recommendations. The Japanese Buddhist Federation proposed a design which was not accepted. Then came the government's design, which was prepared after holding public hearings. But Unesco had reservations about this design as well.

What followed was series of recommendations from Unesco experts. The first recommended that the structure should be partially roofed. The next suggested the excavation site should be open-air. The third, which happened to be the same expert Unesco had sent first, had a different recommendation



and opted for a roofed structure. This coincided with what the government had in mind, so construction went ahead. By the time the structure was ready, it pretty much resembled the Maya Debi temple that had been demolished. But then word came from Paris that Unesco was not happy with it.

"Yes, Unesco was displeased with the way the temple was built," said Junko Ohashi, an official at the World Heritage Centre, Paris.

Two more Unesco experts were sent to evaluate the temple complex, but left without making any recommendations. By this point, relations between the Department of Archeology (DoA) and Unesco had soured. At the 28th session of the World Heritage Committee in China last June, officials recall, it finally became known that World Heritage Centre, which acts as the secretariat of Unesco, had not forwarded the design of the new temple to the World Heritage Committee. The DoA says it sent the design through Unesco's Kathmandu office, but the World Heritage Committee was displeased and under the impression that Nepal had rebuilt the temple without its approval.

When we put this to Unesco officials in Paris, Ohashi replied: There were some misunderstandings regarding the communication process in the past.

Some of these misunderstandings are said to have been cleared up in China

last year, and the government proposed that Unesco employ an international expert to be stationed in Nepal who could understand things better. "We convinced them that expert recommendations varied and created confusion. They have agreed to the idea of a permanent expert," DoA Director General Kosh Prasad Acharya told us.

For Lumbini, Ohashi says there will be a local technical working team established, with advise from an international expert who has good knowledge of Buddhist sacred sites.

Two Unesco consultants visited the Lumbini site last May and made recommendations for corrective measures on the new Maya Debi construction. "We have agreed to the points and there are almost no disagreements now," Acharya says.

Independent experts, however, say that there are still serious differences. "Some committee members indicated that possibility during the side meetings at the 28th session of the committee in China," says Jha.

Most conservationists agree that rather than blame-throwing, Unesco and Nepali officials should sit down and draw up a concrete plan of action on how to implement existing laws so Lumbini and Kathmandu Valley are not de-listed. Said one expert, who declined to be named: "The problem is not that we don't have ideas, it is that we can't seem to enforce them." ●



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Against all odds

Former army chief Sachit Shumsher Rana in *Deshantar*, 1 August

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

I feel the Royal Nepali Army has been able to do its duty. In the year after the army was deployed, the Maoists have been unable to win any of their attacks. They did try to attack in Bhojpur and Beni, but suffered heavy losses. The army has already killed 8,000 of them, including hardcore Maoists and militia. The rebels can't go for frontal attacks and their morale is on the wane. In the beginning, their plan was to occupy the district headquarters and surround the capital. But since their power has diminished, they have engaged in terrorism instead. It is very difficult to stop such terrorism as we have seen in Nagaland and Kashmir for many years. Even in the United States, you had 9/11. From a military point of view, just launching attacks does not mean the battle is won. The Maoists may have been able to stage raids, but they have been losing and the army has been winning. Still, we can't deny the fact that there is no peace in the villages. The army has not been able to show its presence in the villages, and the reason for this is that it is spread too thin.

In a country, you have army, police, paramilitary force, village security force and territorial army. All these forces provide security. In our case, security expense is actually quite low. For example, in India they have a border security force, and yet they have established a Special Security Border (SSB) force of 70,000. In Bihar, they have the army, SSB force, border security force, internal police and home guard. Despite all these provisions, they are having a tough time maintaining law and order. Now compare those figures to what we have. Till two years ago, we had only 52,000 soldiers. After the Sher Bahadur Deuba government declared the state of emergency, additional soldiers were recruited and the number has reached 78,000.

The target was to have an armed police force of 15,000. So far, we have been able to reach about 6,000. There may be around 50,000 thousand in the police force, but many have not been properly trained. That is why they were unsuccessful in beating back the Maoists. In India, they even have an industrial security force. They have a separate force to protect railway stations. But in our case, the terrorists can easily cause explosions in factories. There is no provision for the security of such property, and the Maoists are cashing in on the situation.

During the Surya Bahadur Thapa government, there were some positive developments for security. The government prepared a policy for village security force programs. However, the political quarters and human rights activists opposed this. They argued that the concept of a village security force would give rise to militarisation in the country. But that was a fallacy. The idea was to mobilise youths under the leadership of ex-servicemen. What could be a better alternative for a country with an inadequate number of soldiers?

The open border has been a big problem in controlling the movement of arms in the Maoist camp. We have information that the Maoists have been taking advantage of the open border to accumulate arms and manufacture bombs. For fear of getting arrested, Maoist leaders and activists sneak into India. But the good news is that India does not see the Maoists in a positive way. They have realised that Nepali Maoists can pose a threat to their security as well. If India's SSB force keeps a strict eye on them, the Maoists can be controlled very quickly.



Chop hands off

Kantipur, 3 August

कान्तिपुर

Two journalists who filed stories critical of the Maoists in Dailekh have been warned that they will have their hands chopped off. The reporters, Bhupendra Shahi of *Gorkhapatra* and Kamal Neupane of the local *Sushil* daily wrote about Maoist extortion from businesses in the area. The reporters said they received this warning when they met up with local Maoist leaders last week. Last month, the Maoists abducted the Radio Nepal correspondent in Dailekh, Dekendra Raj Thapa.

Meanwhile, there has been outrage over the abduction of *Nepal Samacharpatra* correspondent and INSEC representative in Surkhet, Durga Thapa, by Maoists while he was on a reporting trip nearby. The Maoists say Thapa was engaged in 'anti-people activities' and have sentenced him to 25 days of hard labour. Among those who have lodged strong protests against the Maoists are the International Press Institute National Committee, political parties and human rights organisations. They said in a joint statement: "This is an unacceptable attack on human rights and the right to free expression."

Mayor murdered

Nepal Samacharpatra, 4 August

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Rajendra Sribastab had gone to his home village on a motorcycle for the funeral of a relative who had drowned. He was the mayor of Gularia until forced to resign three months ago due to Maoist threats. As a precaution, he had taken along policeman Ratna Singh Tharu. Maoists abducted Sribastab from the funeral procession, took him a distance away and beheaded him with a sword while he still



had his helmet on. Later, they dumped his body on the funeral pyre of his relative where it was only partially burned. The 54-year-old ex-mayor had pleaded for his life before his execution. But a Maoist commander said, "Cut him, cut him." Then one of the Maoists slashed his throat from the front and behind.

Policeman Tharu was later released on condition he would resign from the force, and he is too shocked to speak. Sribastab's wife, Kumud, is in deep shock. "I never imagined they would be so cruel," she said as she wept. Sribastab has three sons and two daughters. The Maoists had accused him of various 'anti-people' crimes. Large numbers of people attended a memorial service on Tuesday, where Sribastab's remains were gathered and cremated on another pyre.

Teach parents

Rajdhani, 1 August

राजधानी

PANAUTI—Schoolboy Pramod Sharma is a sex educator, and has given new meaning to the concept of 'peer education'. Teachers don't want to talk about sex in class, and ask students to read the sex education part of the course at home. In a society where sex talk is still taboo, 14-year-old Pramod has a difficult time teaching grown-ups. "It's much easier to educate children than adults, most of whom get furious," Pramod says. Despite

criticism, he is determined to share his knowledge with everyone. His first challenge was to educate his father, a government officer. Dad was shocked and angry when his son suggested he carry a condom. But after his son explained he was involved in campaigning against sex-related diseases and HIV, Pramod's father started listening.

Over 75 school students like Pramod are volunteering as sex educators in Panauti to raise awareness about HIV prevention. Student volunteers go all the way to Banepa and Dhulikhel to talk about sex. "We have full confidence to educate anyone on this matter," says high school student Manju Thapa, who initially found the task daunting.

Self-taught

Rajdhani, 3 August

राजधानी

Students in Nepal's only Ayurvedic campus become medical graduates without finishing their courses. For the 18 subjects in the Ayurvedic faculty, students need at least 36 teachers but they have only 13. The students have to complete much of the course on their own, and even when they do have teachers, things aren't much better.

There is no paediatrician, so the campus has appointed a teacher with a PhD in philosophy to teach the subject. There are similar cases with the teachers for maternity and gynaecology. There is no one to teach ENT (Ear, Nose & Throat), pathology and surgery. The campus even lacks training on poison and animal bites. "The campus chief is supposed to teach us one of the subjects," some students say, "but he never turns up for class."

The campus is run under the administration of the Tribhuvan University Institute of



"Constituent Assembly...
...Murdaabad!"

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The organisation urges ...CPN (Maoist) to allow human rights defenders to operate without fear of attack or abduction and to guarantee freedom of expression in the areas under their control."

An open letter by Amnesty International in relation to the Maoist threat to cut off the limbs of two Nepali journalists for reporting extortion by Maoists, 4 August

Medicine. The classes are held in Nardevi, the school administration is in Kirtipur and the student hostel is in Dallu. Student union leader Madan BC says: “If they can’t improve the campus, they should do something about it.”

Japan alert

Rajdhani, 3 August

राजधानी

Japan’s foreign ministry has issued an alert stating that Nepal is not a safe destination and advising its citizens not to travel here. The travel advisory by the ministry has caused serious concern among travel agents in Nepal. On 28 July, it said even Chitwan, Pokhara and Kathmandu are unsafe areas. Last year, more than 20,000 Japanese tourists visited Nepal, the second highest number of visitors. The alert will cause big losses for the tourism entrepreneurs, even though they claim that Nepal has always remained safe for the tourists despite the Maoist conflict. Up until this announcement, the Japanese government had not listed Nepal as an unsafe destination.

Capital attack?

Nispaksha, August 3

निष्पक्ष

There is a quiet before the storm in Kathmandu. No bombs going off and no assassinations. The people think the army is doing a good job of controlling the rebels. But analysts say the Maoists are busy planning an attack in the heart of Kathmandu. Area commander Prashant recently said in an interview that the capital will be targeted to get international attention so that the government will be under pressure to declare a ceasefire. The security forces think that an open and organised Maoist attack is impossible. But the Maoists could be planning high-profile assassinations of politicians, officials and individuals close to the king on the Maoist hit list. Security has been heightened for VIPs and plainclothes security are on patrol.

Maoist split

Drishti, 3 August

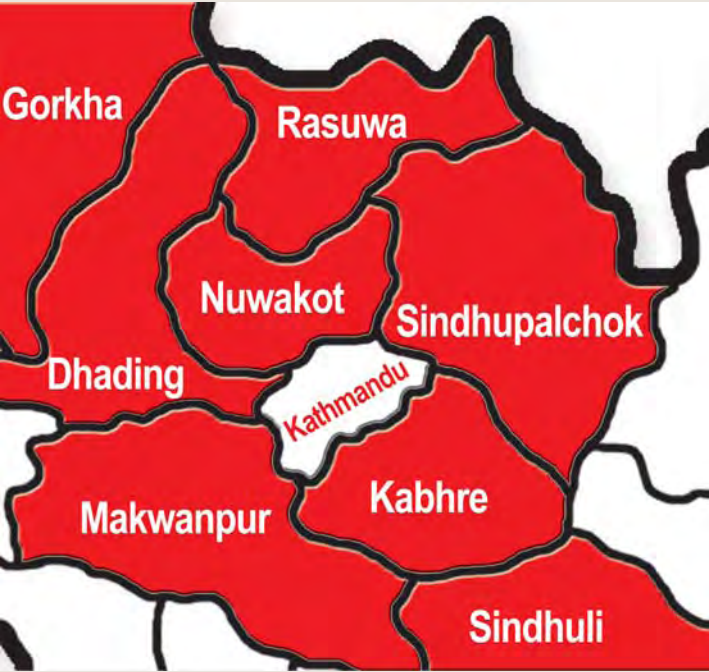
दृष्टि

The Kirant Workers Party (KWP) and the Madhesi Liberation Front (MLF) have decided to break with the Maoists. Both joined the Maoists hoping to raise concerns of their backward and disadvantaged communities. On 27 July, they decided to split. The MLF blames the Maoist leaders for creating a split among the Madhesi leaders and their party. A new Janatantrik Terai Front has been established, to be led by KWP founding member, Jaya Krishna Goit. The KWP controls the eastern region and one of its senior leaders holds a key position as central committee member of the Maoists. This is a big blow to the Maoists because the two groups make up 60 percent of the Maoist army in the region.

Himal Khabarpatrika, 31 July-15 August 3, 2004

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

The Maoist strategy to strangle Kathmandu with a military buildup in the surrounding districts of Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading and parts of Gorkha, Sindhupalchok, Kabhre and Makwanpur has suffered setbacks. The reason is the increased efficacy of the army’s intelligence in recent months, which has allowed key leaders to be captured and killed. The leaders of the ‘Ring Area’ used to be Hit Bahadur Tamang and Bharat Dhungana. Tamang was among the 11 Maoist leaders captured by Indian police in Patna in May and Dhungana was killed in an army action in Dhading last month. The ring area strategy is to destroy the economic and political centre of the country so that the Valley’s intellectuals and public will be cowed into supporting the Maoists. The rebels think that such action in the capital would also force Kathmandu-based diplomats to push for negotiations and soften the government’s hardline stance on talks. But internal information leaks and improved intelligence has allowed the security forces to maul Maoist capacity in the area, a fact that the rebels themselves have acknowledged. The arrest of the Valley Committee chief, Rabindra Shrestha, earlier this year was the single biggest blow to the Maoists. Even before that, the Maoists had set up a Valley Zone Committee by integrating it with eastern Dhading and Nuwakot. They gave that up and set up a Rasuwa-Nuwakot-Dhading Committee to back up their strength in the Valley. After Rabindra Shrestha’s arrest, the Maoists put Dilip Maharjan and ‘Nischal’ in charge of the Valley Committee and restored its power in the capital just before the last ceasefire in late 2002. After the truce collapsed in August 2003, the army cracked down on Maoist hideouts and captured military strategist Nischal. Three months later, Dilip Maharjan was among others netted in Patna. The Maoists had to start all over again, and have now appointed ‘Prabhakiran’ to rebuild the Valley organisation. The arrest of Tamang and Maharjan and the killing of Nuwakot native Dhungana have been serious setbacks for the Maoists. So far, the army has managed to eliminate 75 senior Maoist leaders and senior cadre in the ring area. Part of the reason for this could be



that the army has more resources and commitment to guard the capital. The army has deployed its 6th Battalion in Baireni with the unified command to go after Maoists in Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading. The army has used information from captured Maoists and from informants in the field effectively to net key leaders, and claims to have achieved unprecedented success. Currently the unified command is carrying out special operations in the area north of the Trisuli River in Dhading, western Rasuwa and western Gorkha. The army says there are only about 250 hardcore Maoists in the area. It is understood that the military is using shoot-to-kill tactics against senior leaders during operations in order to demoralise grassroots cadre, supporters and sympathisers. But however successful their operations, the Maoists have vowed revenge for the capture and killing of their leaders.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

USAID/Nepal is an equal opportunity employer committed to a staff composition that reflects the social and ethnic diversity of Nepali society. We believe that social inclusion and diversity contribute to excellence. When requisite professional qualifications and experience are fully met and essentially equivalent among finalists for the position; Women, Lower caste, and under-represented ethnic group finalists will be given priority. Thus, fully qualified aspirants from these groups are especially encouraged to apply.

USAID/Nepal invites applications from all qualified Nepalese citizens for the following position under a Personal Services Contract, subject to availability of funds.

1. A.I.D. Development Program Specialist, FSNPSC-12 (Entry Level at FSNPSC-11, depending on qualifications and work experience)

Basic Functions of Position: The AID Development Program Specialist has a broad range of complex functional, analytical and informational responsibilities that include: management, coordination, advice, analysis, reporting and data collection.

The incumbent serves as a senior USAID technical professional in an office that focuses on supporting initiatives to strengthen Democracy and Governance (DG). The incumbent will specifically focus on “rule of law” (ROL) areas (e.g. justice sector modernization and reform; enhanced access to justice for the poor and disenfranchised, and public sector accountability/anti-corruption initiatives). S/he will manage USAID’s rule-of-law program portfolio and ensures close collaboration with implementing public sector and civil society organizations.

2. DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS:

A. EDUCATION: A Doctorate of Law degree is required. In addition to the Law degree, an advanced degree in a social science, political science and/or management field is preferred.

B. EXPERIENCE: Three to five years of progressively responsible and successful experience in positions contributing to justice sector reform and/or promotion of good governance. Preference will be given to those who have proven skills in strategic planning, organizational strengthening, sector analysis, program management, and evaluation of complex programs. Excellent spoken and written Nepali and English (Level 4) is essential. Working knowledge of other major languages spoken throughout Nepal is preferred

C. LANGUAGE:

D. KNOWLEDGE: The candidate should have a strong grasp of democracy and governance issues in Nepal, and especially justice sector and public sector accountability/anti-corruption reform requirements. The Rule of Law Programs Specialist must be able to conceptualize — with socio-political sensitivity — highly complex, inter-dependent, and mutually reinforcing program arenas, while working effectively within each of them. Working knowledge in strengthening organizational management, enhancing public sector governance and policy formulation are core to the requirement. Knowledge of programs and procedures of major international and bilateral donors in Nepal is desirable, but not mandatory. Knowledge of International and Nepali civil society programs addressing good governance and rule-of-law reform agendas is a plus.

E. ABILITIES/SKILLS: Skills honed while successfully working with a wide and diverse range of both government and civil society partners are highly desirable. Applicants should demonstrate the ability to represent USAID in national and international forums related to justice sector reform and national anti-corruption programs. The incumbent must demonstrate ability to appropriately include women and disenfranchised groups in program partnerships to achieve objectives and goals. Outstanding written and oral presentation skills, particularly in the areas of justice sector and governance reform are essential. Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to function collaboratively and productively as a member of a multi-disciplinary and multi-functional team are expected. Excellent word processing and analytic computer skills are required (preferably in Microsoft Office).

Interested individuals may contact the Human Resources Office, USAID/Nepal, Rabi Bhawan for a detailed job description for the above position and Biographical Data Sheet. Applications must be in the form of a letter of interest, a detailed curriculum vitae or resume’ and the USAID Biographical Data Sheet along with Nepali citizenship paper and academic certificates. Applications must be received in the Human Resources Office no later than 5:00 p.m. on August 19, 2004. Applications received after the submission date will not be considered. Qualified candidates from disadvantaged group and women are encouraged to apply. Please give your telephone number where you can be contacted. TELEPHONE INQUIRIES ARE DISCOURAGED.

ONLY SHORT-LISTED CANDIDATES WILL BE CALLED FOR AN INTERVIEW.

Human Resources Specialist
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The Indian example

India's 2004/2005 budget has dazzling implications



A decisive blow was struck against poverty when India's new Finance Minister Chidambaram tabled the 2004/2005 budget. India has rapid economic development

COMMENT
Jeffrey D Sachs



and dynamism in the information technology sector, yet is also home to 300 million of the world's poorest people. In

last May's national elections, India's rural voters unseated the ruling coalition. The lesson was clear: attend to rural poverty. The new government has listened, putting forward a program that is dazzling in its implications, for India and the developing world.

India's new government is led by a veritable "dream team" of international development. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is one of the world's

leading development economists, who began India's market reforms as finance minister in mid-1991. He dismantled decades of inefficient and ineffective government restraints on trade, investment and entrepreneurship, unleashing more than a decade of the fastest economic growth in India's history.

Upon returning to office as prime minister, Singh brought

into government an experienced and internationally renowned team, including Finance Minister Chidambaram and Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who heads the Planning Commission, the key body assessing India's medium-term public investment strategies.

When the former government lost the vote this past May, and Singh's government came into office, there were fears that Singh would be hamstrung by left-wing coalition partners, who would demand that market reforms be dismantled as the price of their participation in the new ruling coalition. Chidambaram's 2004/2005 budget puts those fears to rest. The document is a brilliant lesson in development economics: it shows how to combine a full-speed ahead approach to market reforms with urgently needed attention to poverty. In short, the budget is a model for all developing countries.

At the heart of the budget is the realisation that reducing poverty requires both rapid economic growth and targeted investments aimed at the poorest of the poor. Rapid economic growth is to be based on the private sector, including foreign direct investment. Thus, the budget supports critical areas of market reform and growth promotion, including measures aimed at deepening the financial sector, promoting exports and liberalising foreign direct investment.

The key, however, is that the budget does not rely simply on "trickle-down" economics to raise living standards. The second pillar of poverty reduction is targeted investments for the poor, particularly for the rural poor. This approach commits India's national government and state governments to ensuring that all Indians have access to basic social investments, including health, nutrition, and schooling, and to basic infrastructure, including electricity, safe drinking water and inputs for modern agriculture. Every village is to be lifted up in the next few years and empowered with the basic tools to become economically productive.

The scale of the challenge is immense. There are an estimated 600,000 villages in this vast country of one billion citizens. Villages that are far from major ports and cities tend to be poorer and less invigorated by the recent economic growth. The government proposes to equip these villages with the basic infrastructure and services for economic development.

The government's programs are not mere populist promises. They reflect sensible investments that it intends to pursue. The budget calls for a surtax on incomes to help pay for increased social expenditure.

The lesson for other developing countries is that spending on the poor for health, education, safe drinking water, electricity and the like is not simply pandering—it is a serious and productive investment. It may be expensive to educate a child, but it is far more expensive to a society to leave a child without education. Uneducated children will be burdens on their societies for decades to come. It is far more rational to spend a little extra income now for a few years of schooling than face decades of social costs resulting from masses of uneducated adult workers!

But even India, with its growing economy, cannot afford to make these investments out of national resources. India will need some help, at least temporarily, from richer countries and international institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

The rich world should not be grudging in its help to India. By providing a few billion dollars per year in assistance now, the donor world would ensure a prosperous, democratic and stable partner in India for decades to come. In other words, it is time for donors to step up to help reform-minded yet poor countries like India, and, even more urgently, those in Africa that are similarly committed to economic development. ●
(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

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VICTORIA MOORE in LONDON

Food tastes different at 30,000ft. And that's nothing to do with the "Ooh, I'm in a plane and off on my holidays," effect. It actually does taste different. No one knows why this should be, nor even whether it is the food itself that is materially altered at altitude, or the palate's ability to interpret flavours or, indeed, whether everything just tastes odd when you eat it from a plastic tray, legs scrunched up half to your chest, chin butting against the seat in front, surrounded by screaming children.

Soon, though, we should find out, because this is just one point on a long list of tasks assigned to the professor of airline food at the University of Surrey in England.

"So much fun has been made of airline food, but it's a big industry," says Willie Seeman, founder-president of the International Flight Catering Association (IFCA) which represents all major airline food producers and is funding the appointment.

We have come a long way since Charles Lindbergh made his 34-hour solo flight across the Atlantic with just five sandwiches in his travelling bag. In-flight catering is now a \$14 billion-a-year global industry employing more than 100,000 people. Virgin Atlantic says catering is its third biggest cost, behind fuel, engineering and maintenance.

A jumbo jet preparing to set out on a long-haul flight may be loaded with up to 42,000 separate catering items. British Airways passengers flying out of London Heathrow chew their way through 70,000 meals each day and consume 41 tonnes of chicken breasts, 45 tonnes of strawberries, 127 tonnes of tomatoes and 600,000 pints of milk every year. All BA meals are cooked two to eight hours before they are needed and are kept chilled before being loaded onto the plane where they are reheated in ovens that have the capacity to steam and bake. First and business class meals are at least partially fresh—you can boil an egg and cook pasta on a plane.

"Psychologically we attach great importance to the food we're given in the air," says David Airey, head of the school of management studies at the University of Surrey. "I get very agitated if I'm not served quickly, or if my wine doesn't come straight away with my food, in a way that I just don't in restaurants on the ground."

Airline passengers may be a captive audience but they are also highly critical. Now that air travel is routine, we're not willing to forgive those who fail to meet the exacting standards demanded by our newly educated palates. Though this still doesn't explain why we get so ridiculously worked up about it.

"The actual purpose of the carrier is to get people from A to B without killing them and if everything goes all right they forget this," points out Michael Kipps, co-author of a book on flight catering and professor of food management at Surrey. "The only variable part of the service is the food and that's why we talk about it so much."

According to both BA and Virgin, we want three things: nutritious and healthy food, the ability to control both what and when we eat, and menus to reflect the sort of food we eat on the ground.

The core menu choices in Virgin's economy class are roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes, broccoli and gravy, chicken korma with coriander rice or pasta with roast vegetables and goat's cheese. On a typical flight, 40 percent of passengers will go for the roast, 40 percent for the korma and the remaining 20 percent for the vegetarian pasta option.

But travellers are a tricky lot to please. BA was surprised when no one wanted to eat rangdang, a dish they put on their world traveller menu. It turned out that no one knew quite what it was. So the airline changed its name to Malaysian-style curry and its popularity soared. ● (The Observer)

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passions. The right-wingers did not help matters when they went public with vehement cries against the film. If you draw intense attention to something, even if it is negative attention, it only makes people more anxious to see what the fuss is about.

So what about the film itself? It has been described as Moore's one-man crusade against President George W Bush, a man who Moore decries as an ignorant, lazy,

incompetent jerk-off in glaring dereliction of duty. Moore's publicly stated goal: use the film *Fahrenheit 9/11* to "expose the truth" that Bush forsook the concerns of the American people and pushed his own corrupt, selfish political and financial agenda, and hope that the film influences the outcome of the 2004 presidential election (but more commentary on Moore's so-called intentions later).

Most prominent is Moore's claim that the Bush administration used 9/11 as a manipulative tool to condition the American public into rabid fear of terrorism, thus ensuring that the country would get

Unfairheit?

Moore is a good filmmaker, but in *Fahrenheit 9/11* he shamelessly exploits the prevalent anti-war sentiment

behind the eventual decision to go to war with Iraq. Does the film explore relevant issues that all Americans should consider? Absolutely.

Although the duplicitous Bush agenda has been public for several months now, this does not make it common knowledge. No matter how much Moore strains credibility, there are basic facts presented that anyone should know. We went to war with Iraq, a country that has never attacked the US and has not proven to be linked to 9/11. The Bush administration pushed for the attack claiming that there were WMDs, although they were never found. We went into Iraq not knowing when or how we would get out, leaving many soldiers stranded in a purgatory of counterattacks by various extremists.

Osama bin Laden's family has political and financial ties to the Bush family and were allowed safe exit from the US by plane immediately following the 9/11 attack, when all other planes were grounded.

These and other facts are important to bring into the

limelight, and now I feel is a good time to bring up Moore's previous film, *Bowling for Columbine*, which explored America's predilection for firearms which truly inspired one to ponder the true state-of-affairs in our country today.

By contrast, *Fahrenheit 9/11* is the cinematic equivalent of a polemical editorial drowning in free-floating anger. No matter how Moore tampers with veracity, I certainly believe him to be impassioned, but the film meanders with no apparent intention other than to be angry, and the result comes across as more of a rant than a persuasive political statement.

Some would say that it does not matter, so long as the message gets across. I disagree. If Moore's goal is to show the effect of Bush's actions on the everyday American, he should ensure beyond a shadow of a doubt that his material comes across as free of fabrication. Otherwise, we are subject to dramatic manipulation, which is appropriate for fiction, but not when one is claiming that what is onscreen is nonfiction. Don't get me wrong. I absolutely abhor George Bush, and I think his presidency has been a disaster for the nation in many ways. But if you repeatedly resort to low-end comedy you dilute whatever chance you may have in impressing your political view on the general public and advancing your supposed agenda to supplant Bush.

Despite these glaring flaws, there are several sequences in the film that are successful and intensely powerful. The first is footage of Bush in a Florida classroom on the morning of 11 September 2001. When he is informed of the attacks, we do not see a decisive leader, but something more akin to a deer caught in headlights. The confusion and incompetence are readily apparent.

There is the disturbingly immediate footage from Iraq that



shows the US military personnel as stranded and directionless, but also oppressive and inhumane. Then there is Moore's exploration of the government's use of fear as a manipulative device. Moore interviews several experts who convincingly argue for the notion that the Bush administration bombarded the public with messages conditioning Americans to be afraid of terrorism and prepare for an attack by anybody, anywhere, at any moment. (They're still doing it with the orange alert this week that it turns out is based on pre-9/11 information.)

I don't doubt that Moore truly aligns himself with the ultra-left politics of his films, but I honestly can't believe that his actions in promoting *Fahrenheit 9/11* are entirely genuine. Errol Morris's recent documentary *The Fog of War*, which did no business compared to Moore's film, is more ocused and genuinely illuminating than anything you will see in Moore's film.

If most of the people who see this movie already tend definitively towards the left, there is no change in voter outcome. Similarly, many who lean towards the right will hate the film without seeing it. Again, there is no change in voter tendency. That leaves the moderates, and I seriously doubt many will say, "I voted against Bush because I saw *Fahrenheit 9/11*."

Fahrenheit 9/11 is being screened by The Film Club at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka on 7-8 August at 2PM. Tickets Rs 50 (available at the venue, no prior bookings). Tel: 5542544



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Slope rating

Different strokes for different slopes

I recently overheard a conversation at the golf club on how a golf course's 'slope rating' and 'course rating' affect a player's handicap. It wasn't long before I was invited to join the group and clear up the confusion.

The golf handicapping system allows players at any skill level or age group to compete with one another on the same platform. It was found that unless this system incorporated the difficulty of a course, it had its limitations, which was affecting the fairness of competitions.

For example, golfers with 15 handicaps earned at difficult courses would have a great advantage over those who normally play on easier courses. Since golf courses vary so much in difficulty, a course rating system was devised to quantify the playing difficulty levels of each course and thus attempt to reach a fairer handicapping system.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Then it was found that on more difficult courses, the discrepancy between the scores of stronger and weaker players was greater. The course rating system did not account for that factor. Thus the slope rating system for courses was devised. This is a number representing the relative difficulty of a course for bogey golfers compared to scratch golfers.

For these calculations a scratch golfer is taken as a male golfer who hits his drives 250 yards and can reach a 470-yard hole in two, or a female golfer who hits her drives 210 yards and can reach a 400-yard hole in two, and has a handicap of zero.



A bogey golfer is defined as a male player who has a handicap between 17.5 and 22.4, and hits his tee shots 200 yards and can reach a 370 yard par 4 in two shots, and a female golfer with a handicap between 21.5 to 26.4, who hits her drives 150 yards and can reach a 280-yard hole in two.

The course rating of a particular 18-hole course is

done through a comprehensive evaluation of the playing difficulty of that course for a scratch golfer under normal course and weather conditions, and produces a result which represents the average score of the best 50% of rounds played by scratch golfers.

It is calculated by measuring the course yardage coupled with factors that affect the actual playing length and difficulty of each hole, such as, but not limited to, altitude, uphill and downhill roll, doglegs, hindrances such as trees, bunkers water hazards and rough, the effective width of the fairway and their impact on the player.

Thus for a par 72 course, a course rating of 74 would indicate a much harder course than one rated at 68. Slope rating is a measurement of the difficulty of a course for bogey golfers relative to the course rating, and range from 55 (easiest) to 155 (hardest). In the United States an averagely difficult course is given a slope rating of 113.

These two ratings are used to first calculate your 'handicap index' over a minimum of five rounds. This handicap index is then used with a course's slope rating to calculate your 'course handicap' for that course (Index x Slope Rating) divided by 113. The result determines the number of handicap strokes given on that course.

In Nepal we still don't follow these types of systems. Perhaps we should consider getting all our courses rated, and thus hopefully remove the last few complaints on different handicap levels at our courses.

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



STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

Security on war footing

With nine days to go, Greek security forces are on high alert for the first Olympics since 9/11

Tensions in Iraq and the Middle East have sparked fears that Islamic extremists are planning a major attack on the 13-29 August Games and prompted Greece to lay on the biggest security operation in Olympic history with a 1.2 billion euro budget.

"Security has acquired a primary role since the tragic incidents of 11 September 2001 and the rise in terror threats," Greek armed forces chief Yiorgos Antonakopoulos told a news conference this week.

Almost every member of Greece's armed forces—one of the largest in NATO—will be directly or indirectly involved in ensuring the safety of the Games and protecting the thousands of athletes, officials, journalists and spectators at the sporting extravaganza.

"Three thousand years after the ancient Olympics, which were games of celebration and peace, humanity is forced to take strict measures to protect against attack," lamented the Greek minister in charge of the event, Fanni Palli-Petralia.

Greece called on NATO for extra help after the March railway bombings in Madrid that killed 191 people in the worst such attack in Europe since the 1988 Lockerbie bombing in Scotland.

The transatlantic alliance is providing AWACS air surveillance planes, as well as its Mediterranean fleet and a biochemical and nuclear warfare unit and will keep a 400-strong emergency evacuation force on standby outside Greek borders. More than 50,000 Greek servicemen and 2,400 officers have been drafted in for the security operation codenamed 'Ifitos' after the Greek king who founded the ancient Olympics, said the lieutenant general of Greece's joint chiefs of staff Vassilis Yiannopoulos.

Around 15,000 troops will guard the Olympic venues, vital

installations and tourist sites in Athens as well as in another four cities hosting the football tournament. The rest will be on duty in airfields and on war vessels which have been out since Monday, patrolling the country's extended sea frontiers in search for rogue boats possibly carrying foreign extremists.

Greece is also deploying anti-aircraft Patriot missiles to enforce a shoot-down policy against rogue planes entering the Greek capital's airspace, echoing similar action in the 1996 Atlanta summer Olympics and the 2002 Salt Lake City winter Games.

Athens airport will impose a policy of strict segregation to keep Olympic Games visitors and tourists apart when they

Olympic family doesn't come into contact with regular passengers," the airport's assistant director, Ioannis Parashis, said on Monday. Some 2,500 athletes, trainers and journalists have already arrived.

Games-bound visitors account for only about 10 percent of the 1.8 million passengers expected. Parashis said they've done everything they could to ensure the heightened security arrangements disrupt regular traffic as little as possible.

Athens airport, expected to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors during the Games, is being protected by 1,000 police officers in addition to the airport's own



arrive in the Greek capital. Over 21,500 flights are scheduled to pass through Athens airport in August, with 800 flights carrying 72,000 passengers touching down the day before the opening ceremony next Friday.

Once on the ground athletes and Olympic personnel will be cut off from regular passengers under special arrangements to ensure maximum security. Part of the main terminal building has been turned into an Olympics zone, and a new arrivals lounge will be at the disposal of visiting heads of state.

"The idea is that the

700 non-armed security guards. Since winning the 2004 Games back in 1997, Greece has had to dramatically increase its security budget from an initial 600 million euros, and the number of troops involved.

"Initial plans foresaw the mobilisation of 7,000 men and women, this number jumped to 55,000, excluding international participation," Antonakopoulos said. In all, a total of 70,000 people, almost seven times the ratio of participating athletes, will be involved in the Games's security planning, including military personnel, policemen, coastguards and firemen. ●



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) invites application from qualified persons for the position of

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Exhibition** of work by Pilaiporn Pethrith Lisborg. 6-12 August at Gallery Moksh, Jhamsikhel. Closed Mondays.
- ❖ **Masticated faces** by Shujan Chitrakar. Dealing with death and distrust, Gallery Nine. 11AM-6PM until 8 August. 4428694

EVENTS

- ❖ **Fashion party** 6 August at 1905, Kantipath. Rs 350. 4441037, 4445938
- ❖ **Miss Nepal** 7 Aug, 4.30 PM at BICC. Live broadcast on NTV.
- ❖ **Old Book Sale** at the British Council Library, Lainchaur. 7 August, 10AM-2PM. 4410798
- ❖ **4th Bagmati River Festival** till 21 August: Dunga Daud, press/media rafting challenge on 7 August, starting 7AM at Sundarijal. Art competition for schools, 3PM-5PM on 7 August. Kalmochan Ghat, Thapathali.
- ❖ **Fahrenheit 9/11** 2PM at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka on 7 and 8 August. Tickets Rs 50 at the venue.
- ❖ **Movies** 2PM onwards at the Alliance Francaise: Une sale affaire, 8 August
- ❖ **Missions and medicine in Nepal:** Some anthropological reflections. Lecture by Ian Harper. 5.30 PM on 9 August, Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka.
- ❖ **St. Augustine's (Kalimpong) School Day Celebration** @ Hotel Nirvana, Thamel. 5.30 PM on 28 August. Tickets Rs 200 for 1996 batch & later and Rs 400 for everyone else. 9851020267, 9851022090
- ❖ **Surviving in culture** Support the Blue Diamond Society. 31 August, 12 noon to 2PM, starting at Tridevi Marg. 4443350, 4445147
- ❖ **Saturday nature show** Bird watching and presentations at Park Village Hotel, Budhanilkantha. 4434705/9851074300



MUSIC

- ❖ **Spicy Mix** with Rakhi Sawant, Anil Singh, Shanon Scam and Nebha. 7 August, Rs 200 at the BICC ground. 4441037, 4445938
- ❖ **Live music** at Moksh. A-Four Guitar Quartet on Tuesdays and Full Circle on Fridays. 6PM onwards, free entry.
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622

DRINKS

- ❖ **Island Bar** with DJ Raju, Abhaya and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Free drink deals** at Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Monsoon Wine Festival** at Kilroy's, Thamel. Rs 150 per large glass.

FOOD

- ❖ **Food Festival** at The Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Exclusive Paratha, Galwatis & Salan, 7 August-15 August. 4491234
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Nature with your meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Summer in Shivapuri** Birdwatching and great views at Sivapuri Heights Cottage. steve@escape2nepal.com. 9851051780
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** every weekend at the Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 4361500
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Spiderman returns, with Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) as a university student with a secret in *Spiderman 2*. His personal relationships are shaky as his beloved Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst) is being wooed by other men, his best friend Harry Osborn has a growing hatred of Spiderman and his Aunt May has fallen on hard times. Things get even worse with new villain, Dr Octopus (Alfred Molina), out to get him.

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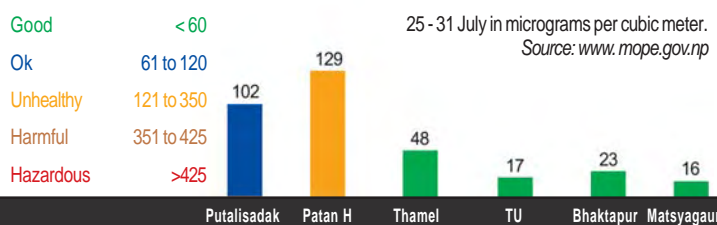
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The big pollution—or lack of it—news for the week is that Putali Sadak actually managed to level out an average PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) concentration of 102, which puts it in the 'Ok' range for once. Sure, the rain required to do this flooded the streets, but at least there was fresh air for those cowering under umbrellas. On a whole, it was a pretty healthy week for the Valley—PM10 concentrations dropped drastically at most of the monitoring stations and the Patan Hospital area was the only one to register unhealthy levels of air pollution.



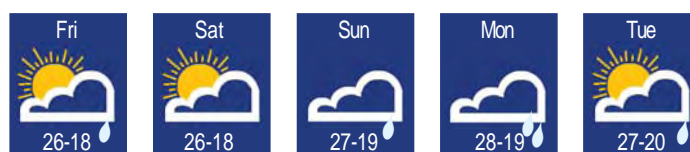
NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



The monsoon's advance has been thwarted by a large high-pressure zone over the western Tibetan Plateau, but clouds are massing up on two fronts: along western India from the Arabian Sea and in the Bay of Bengal. These system will collide over central India and the Himalaya next week bringing heavy downpours. Till then, expect short but heavy showers mainly in the late evening and night over the weekend. Cloud cover in the day will keep temperatures in the 26-28 range, but it will feel hotter because of high humidity.

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RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

HOME SWEET HOME: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba being escorted by Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari on return from Bangkok on Wednesday after participating in the BIMST-EC summit which ended Saturday evening.



KIRAN PANDAY

GREY-WATER RAFTING: Nepal River Conservation Trust has started a 20-minute raft ride on the Bagmati at Thapathali for Rs 20 to raise awareness about the Bagmati.



KIRAN PANDAY

KOIRALA KANGRES: Nepali Congress leaders (*l-r*) Girija Prasad Koirala, Sushil Koirala, Ram Chandra Poudel, Nona Koirala and Lila Koirala at a central committee meeting in Kathmandu on Thursday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SNACK BREAK: A traffic policeman at Ratna Park shares a cucumber with striking taxi drivers, who created a four-hour gridlock on Friday all over the city to protest harassment by the police.



KIRAN PANDAY

FACE-TO-FACE: An art exhibition and performance titled 'Masticated Faces' by Shujan Chitrakar at Gallery Nine, which is "dedicated to all Nepalis".

Dr (Ms) Manandhar

Nepalis have done their PhDs in a lot of things, from nuclear physics to rare species of indigenous frogs. But no one had done a doctorate in Nepali jewellery until Sushila Manandhar.

Growing up in Patan, Sushila was sure of one thing: she would study. By 1983 she had an MA from Tribhuban University, specialising in Nepali history. At 25, she was already lecturing on the constitutional history of England, the political history of Nepal and researching everything from women's participation in income generation to Nepal's bilateral relations with Bhutan or France.

But what she was really interested in was French chronicles and cultural anthropology. She researched the worship of Goddess Taleju, the Bajrabarahi Jatra and the traditional Newari headdress. That brought Sushila to her interest in Nepali jewellery, which she began researching under a grant from the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) at TU in 1992. She got an opportunity to take her study further at the University of Paris.

"Traditional Newari jewellery had adapted Indian and western influences to its own cultural values, not just as ornaments but also as a cultural tool and a medium for human relations," explains Sushila. When babies are born they are given a gold and silver ring by the mother's brother and his wife. It is for protection and a way for the uncle and aunt to affirm the family relation.

Then there is the jangu rite performed when women are 77 years old. By that time most are widows, at which point they shed their ornaments. But for the jangu, the elder is given earrings. "It's really a way to give them a higher social status, which they have lost after the death of their spouse," Sushila explains.

Sushila hopes to put interesting tidbits like these into a book so that there is a historical record of the subject before it is erased by modern mores. When we first requested Sushila for an interview, she was taken aback. "I thought you only wrote about well known people in society," she said. Just goes to prove one needn't necessarily be well known to contribute to knowledge and cultural preservation. ●



KIRAN PANDAY



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Striking while the iron is still hot

One of the signs that a country's democracy has graduated from adolescence to full-blown senility is that its citizens won't take no for an answer anymore. It is with great pride and pleasure, therefore, that I take the opportunity of addressing this forum today to announce that Nepal's democracy has now arrived at such a juncture.

Gone are the days when we performed archaic rituals like forming unions and organising fun-filled protest actions by

staging pen-down strikes, go-slow

strikes, wildcat strikes, walkouts, down tools, or work-to-rules. Even chukka jams and hartals are now passé. We have moved on. As a mature democracy we have no time for such infantile games anymore. And it is a sure sign that our citizens have seized destiny by the scruff of its neck to assert their sovereign rights, that we have now taken the idea of industrial action to a higher post-modern phase.

Gas stations that perform adultery on petrol and diesel have asserted their fundamental right to break the fourth commandment by closing down all petrol pumps for a week until the government said, "OK, OK, you can resume mixing kerosene with diesel. Just don't do it in broadly daylight hours, and give us our cut."

When they flunk their MA exams, do our graduates slink home and mope? No. Do they hang themselves by the ceiling fan? Not anymore. They go to the registrar and rub Kiwi shoe polish on his face and put a garland of chappals around his neck. Then they collect an enraged mob of similarly disenfranchised students and vandalise the the vice-chancellor's office and move on, chanting aggressive republican slogans, to the English Department where they smash up the furniture and set fire to the infrastructures therein. Hee-hee. So much fun, yar.

All this is normal and perfectly acceptable in a healthy and mature democracy, it is the way society vents off steam. And if the vice-chancellor still doesn't give in to the students' demand



KIRAN PANDAY

that they all pass their tests with flying colours, then the irate students have no recourse but to issue dire warnings of "even more violent protests in which case the university management bears full responsibility for the consequences".

And if I was the registrar, I wouldn't just give them full marks in English, but

also award them straight an As in Arson, in the Pandemonium Thesis, in the Bedlam and Havoc Practicals and a distinction in Chaos Theory. It is my personal opinion that the students don't just deserve to pass, they should all be given medals by the king.

And as long as we are awarding medals, this country's highest civilian decoration should go to Girija Koirala for conducting an effective monologue with the Maoists. And to Sher Bahadur Deuba for his expert disappearing act in Pat Pong this week. Seldom has a prime minister of any country distracted the security detail to vanish so completely without trace. No one back home knew where he was for three days.

Just as well because he wouldn't have been able to get into Singha Darbar because taxi drivers were exercising their right to free expression by grid-locking the capital's intersections. Anyway, some of us heaved a sigh of relief when the prime minister reappeared because that means we can use our constitutional right of dissent by staging yet another fast onto death. ●

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