Media bark worse than Maoist bite?

Government officials and the travel trade have reacted angrily to what they say was a “massive exaggeration” of the situation in Nepal during the Maoist Valley blockade last week. They said it distorted the reality and spread false and harmful news about Nepal across the world. “The reporting made it sound like there was a catastrophe here, as if the state was collapsing,” government spokesman Mohammad Motin said during a press briefing on Thursday.

One travel entrepreneur summed it up: “It was a case of the media’s bark being worse than the Maoists’ bite.”

One travel entrepreneur summed if the state was collapsing. This was false and harmful news about distortion the reality and spread blockade last week. They said it Nepal during the Maoist Valley

Weekly Internet Poll  # 152. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

After the siege

In Kathmandu, politicians still don’t get it

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

It looks like they’re taking turns to paralyse Kathmandu. Even before the Maoists lifted their blockade on Tuesday, the four-party opposition announced a new phase of anti-government agitations beginning Friday. There is despair among those who say a political consensus is a prerequisite to future negotiations with the Maoists.

“If only the constitutional forces were on one side, it would have been much easier to deal with the Maoists,” says one political insider. But whichever party joins a royal appointed government, it seems there will always be a rival trying to prevent it from restoring peace and earning the peace dividend.

So the party in power is too busy trying to prevent itself from being toppled to get down to the main agenda: ceasefire and negotiations. Indeed, the vultures are already circling Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s coalition, saying he hasn’t made progress on talks. “How can the government do anything when they keep trying to destabilise it?” asks one exasperated UML member of the government.

Meanwhile, Nepal Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala seems to have suddenly developed an interest in the prime ministership. Although he has said he will not accept the office under Article 127, it is hard to see how else he could become prime minister.

Even some of his counterparts in the four-party alliance have begun to raise eyebrows. “Girija rejected prime ministership under Article 127, but it looks like his followers are trying to convince him to take it,” confided Nepal Workers and Peasants’ Party President, Narayan Man Bijakchhia. Some of Koirala’s colleagues are already rubbing their hands in glee.

“It is now or never for the government,” NC’s Narsing Acharya told us. “It will have to make progress on peace. If it doesn’t, it will have failed in its mandate.”

For optimists, this means that the Deuba government will at least be forced to send feelers to the Maoists. And there were some silver linings this week: the blockade was lifted, the Maoist student wing formed a negotiating committee and the rebels have privately told the industrialists whose businesses they closed to persuade the government to agree to talks in exchange for lifting the closure threat.

Deuba’s spokesman Minendra Rijal says the government is still trying to ascertain whether the Maoists are serious about talks.

“We have been cross checking with various sources because we don’t want the rebels to use the ceasefire for reconstituting and regrouping like they did last time,” he says. The army is said to be concerned that the Maoists used the blockade as a diversion and will also use a future ceasefire to amass forces in the Valley.

Information Minister Mohammad Motin says the government is moving systematically to form a Peace Secretariat that will forge an all-party consensus for talks. “We are trying to figure out exactly what the Maoists have up their sleeves,” he told us. As long as he is at it, he may also want to find out what Koirala’s plans are.
I have difficulty to think of a time when progress was the target of as much censure as it has been in the past two weeks. Negative public opinion and open defiance of the Maoist blockade forced them to withdraw it after a week. They have antagonised the very industries they targeted for extraction by forcing them to close down. The murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa has provoked unprecedented fury. Even for an organisation that is so aware of its revolutionary destination that it is past caring about public opinion, there seems to be uncertainty about what to do next. A high-level meeting presently underway is discussing what the future course of action would be. The rationale for the Valley blockade was part of the Maoist goal of forcing a rural ‘people’s war’ to become insurmountable. To put pressure on the government to agree to its demands for outright surrender. The Maoists had launched a new phase of their strategic offensive to militarily encircle Kathmandu within a ‘Ring Arwa’ and blockade the capital to create economic chaos. The Maoists have a Central Command under the chairmanship of Prachanda, yet they choose to announce the blockade through their regional organisation. This lends credence to the theory that the blockade was a relevant step for a bigger future offensive, and they were trying to test the panicky level of the Valley residents, the experiment of the international community and especially India, the role of the global media, and the state’s capacity to employ a force of employed in a case of a provincial military attack in the Valley. They must be quite pleased with the way the international and Indian media made a big deal out of the blockade, overstating its extent and impact. India’s leadership seems to assume that it has captured the high ground in this case of a prolonged siege was a message to the Maoists to lay off. In Kathmandu, the two leaders have understood the public defiance. However, this has helped them calibrate violence in a repeal of sorts; all this time was the threat of violence to keep most buses and trucks off the highway they even have to blow up anything. The Maoists also want to wage a dynamic war by institutionalising front organisations and their regional political units. Combined with urban guerrilla warfare, this could be one of the methods to them to maximum their support and to minimise the army’s superiority in firepower, amour and airpower.

The Maoists have faced major losses in the past four months with the capture of 13 young cadres in the eastern Arwa hills and the killing of the army’s ‘Ring Arwa’. It has to be said, however, that even with its added intelligence the military hasn’t been able to inflict as much...
Peace by proxy
The only thing going for civil society is its name, it is unimpeachable

In Nepal, civil society has been even less effective than the government in cultivating a culture of peace. To have any role in conflict resolution, civil society needs to have the 4Cs of successful mediation: credibility, competence, consistency, and common sense. Unfortunately, Nepali civil society has generated quite a lot of heat about the necessity of negotiations without throwing any light on how to go about it. A hodge-podge of retirees, out-of-job politicians, ex-bureaucrats, professionals past their prime, and socialites describe themselves as civil society and hog the limelight by alternating between inflammatory and conciliatory statements towards the insurgents. The fact that many of them share a common Panchyast past makes them complicit with the regime of oppression, and are therefore severely credibility-challenged. Had civil society been competent or less donor-driven, we could overlook all that. As human rights guru Michael Ignatieff writes: international donors have created a climate of “capacity sucking-out” by inundating poor countries with broad-spectrum experts from well-endowed NGOs who begin by importing duty-free SUVs and live lavish lives with their First World salaries, and then blame local politicians for all the ills besetting their host country. Consistency is not one of civil society’s strong points. It was the first to fete the insurgents during the truce and began to call them ‘terrorists’ as soon as the government reported listing Nepal near the top

harassment and ‘taxing’ of tourist
Should the publicity ignore the armed
doctrine behind one of their blockade? The middle-class decided to endure the hardship, the rich ignored it completely, the poor didn’t seem undesirably worried. Even the sensation-hungry Nepal media played it down. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba did not sufficiently unmoved to attend the Gianee celebrations at Tundikhel.

Since the Nepali Congress has now come around to agreeing with the constituent assembly, and the UML despite being in the coalition has given its nod to the Maoists only to put pressure on the palace. ●

Translated from the Nepal original. puskar27@yahoo.com

heart, they will see one mission: to establish a totalitarian regime without mercy and need. Reshiva Nakarmi, Kathmandu

SEED
Re: ‘Jugular’ (#210). The significance of the Maoist blockade is that at last Kathmanduites are feeling the pain that the rest of the country had to go through for the past eight years, especially in western Nepal. The media also seems to have been in the reporting because all it is interested in is bombs, bullets and battles. The hardships of the people of western Nepal were often ignored. So Kathmandus now knows what it feels like.
Puspa R Panti, Daddedhura

ADVISORY CAUTION
It was amazing to read the motion of the travel industry that travel advisories and negative publicity hurts tourism in Nepal. (Advisory caution, #211). So one must ask, what kind of publicity should there be about Nepal? Should it ignore the thousands of Nepalis who have been killed by the RANA, police and Maoists? Should the publicity ignore the armed police and army in the streets of Kathmandu? Should the publicity ignore the bombs? Should the publicity ignore the harassment and ‘taxing’ of tourist by the Maoists? Ignore the almost daily violent demonstrations, the Amnesty report listing Nepal near the top in disappearances, and extra-judicial misconduct? Ignore the killings, jail, and beaten journalists? What are western governments supposed to do? Maybe the Hotel Association of Nepal thinks western governments should lie and tell their citizens all is fair throughout the kingdom? Until the king, parties, and the Maoists hold successful peace talks and begin to solve the internal problems of Nepal without the interference of other nations, the tourism industry, like the rest of the economy in Nepal will continue its slide toward collapse.

D Michael van de Veer, Hawaii

OKAL
Finally, OKAL is not just criticizing and criticizing everything that he sets his sights upon but also has something constructive to say. In None of your business (#210) he has not only pointed out what is wrong with the generals becoming executives, but also offers them suggestions for investment. The World Bank has decided that the best rate of return on any investment in the developing world is to educate the girl child. If the army spent its welfare money on opening quality schools all over the country it would be doing this nation a much greater favour than by running banks. Especially because such opaque institutions should never be trusted with anyone’s money.

Name withheld, Jawalakhel

Times 27 AUGUST - 2 SEPTEMBER 2004 #211

We have successfully produced 1.5 MW Hydro Electricity ‘WHITE GOLD’ from the Phewa Devi river and connected to the National Grid of Nepal Electricity Authority thus joining the campaign of the national development through electrification.

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Invest in Indrawati and be a part of the national development

Golden opportunity for investment in hydropower

The first share issue in the hydropower sector in the history of Nepal
Is oil Nepal’s next big thing?

A Scottish oil prospecting company is hoping to strike oil in the tarai, but what will it mean for these wetlands in Nepal?

'Thirmanyans paradise'. (see 'Cairn strikes it big', #208)

While the government in Kathmandu was rubbing its hands with glee at the apparent endorsement of its oil-importing country’s productive potential, Cairn Energy, the company took to the press in an attempt to dispel the circumstantial, saying it could take years of scrupling about backwash to be known if there was any oil down there.

With hard-nosed investors bundling up Cairn’s shares in London on the day it confirmed the successful conclusion of talks, it was clear that optimism was not confined to the Department of Mines and Geology in Kathmandu. The Edinburgh-based company has plenty of people who would be prepared to follow its losses elsewhere.

Helpped by a series of massive discoveries in Rajasthan, an unfancied area of western India, Cairn has been lifted from the ranks of stock market also-rans to the premier league. Valued at £500 million in January, the company is now worth 2 billion plus. All four of the finds that powered the transformation were made on land the mighty Shell had not rated and had sold to Cairn for just £4 million.

While Mike Watts, the company’s wily exploration director, first saw the potential in Rajasthan, Cairn’s feet have ensured its chief, Bill Gammell, a star status in business circles to match his glamorous background. The son of a wealthy oil financier, Gammell became friends as a child with the future President George W Bush while their fathers talked business. He was a classmate of future Prime Minister Tony Blair at an elite Edinburgh school, Fettes College, where he excelled at rugby before going on to play for the Scotland.

Now with the company having discovered more than one billion barrels of oil in India he is sitting on a stake in Cairn worth more than £15 million. As the terms of the company’s Rajasthan licence gave the Indian authorities the right to 30 percent of any area in which oil is discovered, the strikes promise a bonanza for the country’s government.

Little wonder that for some mere mention of Cairn possibly drilling summoned up images of an adventure in Nepal that could only end happily for all concerned. However, Cairn has been relying so far on one more educated guesswork in Nepal where the only well ever drilled found nothing, some 36 years ago. A vast area needs to be studied using time-consuming techniques like seismic surveys of the deep to help turn up leads. It could be years before any wells are sunk.

‘We’re in the early, early stages of exploration, of transient operations, risk capital,’ said Watts. When and if drilling starts, Cairn could easily fail to find oil or gas or not strike enough of the stuff to make installing expensive production infrastructure worthwhile.

Speaking in the third day of the Maoist blockade in Kathmandu last week, after Maoists forced a dozen big companies to closed down, Watts, who has spent years working in countries like Bangladesh, appeared to be relatively unconcerned by the security situation. ‘We’re conscious there is security issues, it’s a bit like the situation in many areas where oil and gas is sought and we will operate with a cautious pragmatic approach.’

However, there is a risk exploration activity could be disrupted, either directly or indirectly by political violence that Cairn may not have encountered elsewhere. Even if all goes to plan, sceptics surveying the oil provinces of the developing world could find plenty of reasons to wonder precisely who would be the beneficiaries of exploration and production in Nepal.

One British expert who asked not to be named noted, Angola and Nigeria as the most grotesque but not the only examples of countries in which the discovery of huge amounts of oil had produced wretchedly for the already rich and powerful, corrupt or otherwise, but no end of misery for the poor. (see: ‘The resource curse’, #206)

The activists say the powerlessness has been the main victims of huge environmental damage resulting from oil spills and reinjection. For them, oil is a type of experiences across the globe, the World Bank recently made

Dateline Guantanamo

The world is best when America sets an example, not when it hurts itself

In the 1990s, when the going was good, Bill Clinton’s government wanted to wind the place down. It was thought too expensive and badly located. Also this little McDonalds-haunted paradise was a magnet for refugees from Haiti, and, of course, Cuba.

Tens of thousands of them came here annually and had to be penned up while their cases were processed. Gitmo, as the base here is known in military slang, was losing its lustre as an outpost of freedom.

Then came September 11th 2001, the American-led war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Also at least one immediate campaign to stamp out militant terrorism. As US forces went into action around the world, they rounded up many a Muslim. Some were handed over by their own countries, others nabbed on the field of battle. In all, close to a thousand were detained, perhaps even more, but we were never really given a number.

A lot of that group ended up here in Gitmo. Who could forget the first TV pictures of dismal captured Muslim men being hauled across steaming tarmacs, confessed or defiant, angry or frightened who could tell? The cameras were too far away. The first inmates to arrive had to sleep in outdoor cells that were little better than metal boxes. As the population got larger, more permanent prison quarters were built. So were a hospital, guard buildings and other structures.

There were howls of outrage against American military detention procedures from human rights groups and decent governments around the world. The Americans listened to some and improved their inmate handling. But what they didn’t do was treat their ‘detained enemy combatants’ as they would like their own soldiers to be treated if arrested by a hostile foreign power. This is the basis of self interest, not to mention the rules of war.

Now the process of trying those ‘enemies of America’ has begun and all I’m seeing so far is a lot of disorganisation, ad-hocism and clumsy behaviour by security. Also, at least one inmate has a vigorous and courageous defence attorney who is fighting hard on behalf of his client to avoid risking his own military career as a lawyer in the army. This is good, but not good enough.

Sooner or later, I hope America realises that the world is best when it sets an example, and doesn’t do things that give rise to anti-Americanism that hurts us all. They could start by putting the men at Gitmo Bay before any other justice system, and not some invention from the Second World War that didn’t even work at the time. ●

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba: If Nepal is the world’s only Hindu kingdom, then this place is the world’s only communist fast food paradise. Food and the extreme left seldom go together, the hammer and sickle sits uneasily alongside capitalist icons like McDonald’s golden arches.

But this remote, archipelago of Cuba, where KFC’s friendly colonel, the Subway sign and Pizza Hut is only communist by proximity, Cuba owns the ground beneath our feet, but the American military walks on it.

Guantanamo Bay was first leased to the United States in 1903, when Cuba was a newly captured colony. So ‘lease’ is probably a bit too lenient to the American government. ‘Given’, ‘delivered post paid’, or ‘snatched’ might be more to the point. This 85 sq km of real estate on both sides of a magnificent natural harbour remains in US hands to this day, despite Fidel Castro’s revolution and years of hostility between Washington and Havana.

MARK WILLIAMSON

IN EDINBURGH

[Image 116x242 to 154x286]

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Tourism Malaysia and Marco Polo Travels have announced a "dream holiday package for Nepalese residents at a gala event on Friday at the Hyatt Regency. The six-day holiday package, the first of its kind in Nepal, is available for US$45,000 per person and covers airfare on Qatar Airways, accommodation and meals. "Given the existing rate of airfare to Kuala Lumpur, the package is not expensive," says Subodh Rana of Marco Polo Travels. Rana is also happy that this is the first national promotion done by any country to tap Nepal’s growing outbound market.

Tourism Malaysia also organised a weeklong Malaysian food and cultural promotion in Kathmandu and a similar event will take place at Qatar Airways, accommodation and meals. "Given the existing rate of airfare to Kuala Lumpur, the package is not expensive," says Subodh Rana of Marco Polo Travels. Rana is also happy that this is the first national promotion done by any country to tap Nepal’s growing outbound market.

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Namaste or not?

Handshakes are more egalitarian than namastes

When people from other societies or cultures, one is immediately struck by the differences in social behaviour and practices. For example, why is it that in some cultures people shake hands when they meet, while in others they sub their noses or exchange kisses on cheeks or they keep at arm’s length and do namaste?

Nepali Pan Rajendra Pradhan

Is it something to do with notions of equality and hierarchy, intimacy and distance? When we shake hands, are we not saying that we are equals, as compared to saluting or namaste-ing? Until as recently as the 1970s, people in rural Holland still used to doff their caps to the upper classes in greeting. They would certainly have been rebuffed had they dared offered their hands to be shaken. Handshakes also symbolise friendship, even among unequal, or signal the end of hostility and forgiving mistakes. The simple, friendly act of shaking hands has multiple meanings both simultaneously and serially, differing according to context.

In the age of economic and cultural globalisation, the handshake has become globalised. In Nepal, more and more people are now beginning to shake hands, especially on formal occasions, such as title-givings and after speeches. It is also increasingly common for Nepalis to shake hands as well as doing namaste. Nepalis are now less hierarchical than they were, say 20 years ago. But shaking hands now signifies not just friendship and equality, but also sets one apart from the more traditional (‘backward’) compatriots.

The namaste (or namaskar) is a form of salutation also practised by Indians, Sri Lankans, Thais, Burmese and other groups influenced by ‘Indic’ cultures. One rational scientific explanation for the evolution of this form of salutation is to avoid spreading germs and dirt. Traditional Nepalis frown upon shaking hands and that other ‘dirty’ practices (such as kissing, which is totally taboo). But he had a special affinity for Nepal. Perhaps owing to his time as a Gurkha officer, school days in Kathmandu, nepali speakers, or even as far back as his Nepali nanpy. Nepal was always special for Doig.

Panday spent many evenings in a bar in Thamel and a friendship ensued. Perhaps it was that very night, as Panday shared his dream with his new friend, that Doig envisioned a hotel garden, later called the Shambala. Inspired, Doig moved to Nepal and even as the foundations of the Shangri-la Hotel were laid, he threw himself into the garden of his dreams—a garden which was not even part of Panday’s blueprints.

Then, in 1979, the Shangri-la Hotel, inspired by James Hilton’s novel of the same name, opened its doors. “Seeing it first,” Hilton wrote, “it might have been a vision fluttering out of his solitary rhythm...it was indeed a strange and half-incredible sight.” That is what Rajendra Pradhan is a Kathmandu-based anthropologist.

The legends still live

Twenty-five years later, Kathmandu’s Shangri-la Hotel shows that the mystique of Kathmandu is still alive

SRADDHA BANSYAT

Twenty-five years ago, herds of hill-crested macaques ran wild in Kathmandu, the valley was an emerald jewel in the lap of the Himalayas, and there was peace and tranquillity all over the land. A couple of Rana palaces converted into upscale lodgings and the first few budget lodgings were just springing up in Thamel. Nepal was a true shangrila and it needed a hotel for a new breed of clientele: not quite hippie and not quite globe-trotting tiller. Khin Bahadur Panday decided to take the gamble.

Panday had earlier decided to break with family tradition and not follow his father’s footsteps into the army. Perhaps unusually at first, he invested all his savings into property in Lazimpait near the big embassies. He got a hotel license and decided to start construction. “I had to finish it in time for my children’s careers to take off. I could not have them ready to work before the hotel was ready,” recalls Panday whose two sons are now managing the hotel.

Luckily, Panday met a group of multi-talented Himalayan specialists led by the famous Renaissance man, Desmond Doig, who shared his vision. Doig was a journalist with the Calcutta Statesman, but had become something of a Himalayan specialist, as conversant on Bhutan as he was on Sikkim. He had a special affinity for Nepal. Perhaps owing to his time as a Gurkha officer, school days in Kathmandu, Nepali speaking students, or even as far back as his Nepali nanny. Nepal was always special for Doig.

Panday wanted his hotel to be, and the Shangri-la became Doig’s canvas as well. Here he brought to life the designs, plans and visions he sketched out on the small pad he carried everywhere. Guided in design only by Hilton’s imagery and his own deep passion for everything Himalayan, the hotel would become one of his masterpieces.

Although everyone agreed it was charming, the first year was less than smooth sailing for the Shangri-la. Utpal Sengupta worked for the Junior Statesman, a cult youth magazine started by Doig in Calcutta. Utpal came up to Kathmandu and started to work on promoting the hotel. It is said, in Utpal’s books you were either for or against the Shangri-la, and if it was the latter, then Utpal had no time for you.

He and Doig used their contacts to build up the Shangri-la image worldwide. Sengupta even pulled his wife Caroline, who he met at the Shangri-la, and his mother-in-law into helping out at the hotel. Caroline’s fine French food and her mother’s famed cordon bleu hooked many a visitor. Utpal and Caroline today run Chet Sing from Babu Mahal Revisited. Doig only lived a few more years to watch the hotel grow.

Sengupta was general manager for 20 years through the tourism boom years. Today, as the ambience of Kathmandu is eroded and the conflict affects tourism, the Shangri-la is still an oasis of calm in a frantic city. And in the middle of that oasis is a tranquil garden called the Shambala, where you can almost imagine Desmond Doig sitting on a garden chair, puffing at a pipe, watching the rose-coloured sunset of a Kathmandu monsoon evening, and sketing away on his notepad.

Panday’s eldest son Prasidha is now managing director, younger son Pravine is executive director and Daman Panday is CEO of the Shangri-la group of hotels and the Shangri-la Holidays travel agency. So what is it about Shangri-la that invokes such total involvement? Dubby Bhagat, Doig’s friend and a self-professed chronicler of the hotel’s history, says: “Perhaps it’s the spirit of the old Ramkhan forest that it was built near that consumes them, or perhaps it is the kind of Kathmandu that drew us all here.”

www.nepalshangri.com

Desmond Doig (above) and the Shangri-la’s Shambala Garden that he designed.
Indian officials last week leaked to the New Delhi media that India was considering “breed-bombing” Kathmandu if the Maoist blockade got worse.

Back in the old days, such a leak would have resulted in a slew of sponsored editorials in the Indian press enthusiastically endorsing official concern about Nepal and echoing India’s strategic interest in Nepal. It is an indication of how much things have changed that editorials in the main New Delhi papers the next day warned the government to stay out of Nepal’s internal affairs.

“I am in India’s longest interest to champion democracy in the neighbourhood without active interference in other countries’ internal affairs,” wrote the Economic Times on 23 August (see clipping above). Another editorial in its sister publication, The Times of India on 24 August echoed this view and even went on to diverge from the official Indian stance on UN mediation saying the world body should be allowed to “take an active role to mediate peace talks in Nepal.” (see box)

The Indian Express, which is edited by India’s foremost geopolitical expert, Shekhar Gupta, makes its stand quite clear: “As a neighbour that could be affected by the fallout, India can only wish Nepal well.”

All this is surprisingly objective by past standards. People in Kathmandu remember the Indian media’s simplistic and inaccurate reporting during the 1990s hijacking debacle in December 1996 when Indian Air Force’s Roshan Rijiju’s visit to Kathmandu as a hotbed of ISI activities.

Recent reporting about the Kathmandu blockade on Indian television may have been exaggerated, but the leaked pages didn’t parrot the official line. It is a sign of changing times.

“If the editorials are any indication, the Indian media has finally got over its Cold War hangover,” says Yubraj Ghimire, editor of the Kathmandu weekly Samaya, who worked in various Indian media in New Delhi for 20 years. “It also shows that they are willing to recognise international peace efforts in Nepal.”

This is a view shared by other Indian watchers, who have noticed that the Indian media’s coverage of neighbours has graduated from patronising preachiness to factual and non-ideological reporting. “Indian journalism has shed its ideological baggage, it has become much more professional,” another media analyst told us. “My only complaint is that Nepal is still a blind spot and they have underestimated the seriousness of the insurgency here and its potential for a spillover into India.”

Political scientist Dhruva Kumar at Tribhuvan University cautions against overplaying this change. “Since Nehru’s time, the Indian media has openly supported the country’s foreign policy towards its neighbours. That link still exists. We just we hints of a shifting these days,” Kumar told us, adding, “this doesn’t mean they are totally liberated from South Block.”

However, coverage of the blockade was one indication of the shift. Although the reporting was restrained, at least it woke up the Indian officialdom and the public about the fact that Nepal is in crisis. As the Economic Times wrote: “India and Nepal must sever links between the insurgents in Nepal and the so-called Maoists of domestic vintage.”

India’s business press has also drawn attention to the Maoist closure of companies in Nepal with Indian investment as well as threats against other businesses. “The Indian media is seeing a generation change. It has moved away from grey-carded academia and retired bureaucrats to young and open journalists who aggressively question the conventional wisdom of New Delhi’s grand pronouncements,” said another Kathmandu-based India watcher.

**Bridge not bully**

Nepal Under Siege

(Edited in The Times of India, 25 August)

We have long warned that the situation in Nepal is fast spinning out of control. Recent events suggest that in fact things might get worse than we thought. New Delhi reports it is ‘watching the situation carefully’. But it is becoming increasingly obvious that a more energetic engagement needs to be made by India in this strategic and sensitive backyard. The grapevine has it that India has stepped up supplies of arms and materiel to help the Nepalese forces combat the Maoists. There must be back-door diplomacy to try to bring the contenders to the negotiating table. However, so far a solution has remained elusive, with the rebels insisting that a constituent assembly should be the precondition for talks.

The palace would be reluctant to put it mildly to liquidate itself. However, some concessions have to be made by both sides. The point is—which party or parties are best suited to play the honest broker?

**Economic Times, New Delhi, 24 August**

NARESH NEWAR

Indian media has become more mature and objective in coverage of Nepal

Don’t rush into Nepal

Angels Don’t Stamp On Urgency

There are reports that New Delhi is considering options of all-round economic sanctions in Kathmandu, backed by back-door diplomacy to try to bring the rebels to the negotiating table. However, so far a solution has remained elusive, with the rebels insisting that a constituent assembly should be the precondition for talks. While the particular ideology and mode of protest may be different in this instance from the one that ended in Nepal’s Civil War, the situation is not that different in that demand is set up a constituent assembly as a strategic goal of the Maoist movement.

 равновесие в оценке международных отношений. Усиливает свои позиции в регионе стабильность и безопасность, а также развитие экономики.

**NATION**

27 AUGUST - 2 SEPTEMBER 2004 #211

**Park Village**

Kathmandu Nature Paradise

Dine with birds, butterflies and fireflies at

Earthwatch restaurant

Farm House Cafe

Doubledeck Alfresco

6 acres woodland. 40 tables, 7 conference halls, 3 restaurants swimming pool, jacuzzi, steam, source, gymnasium, cinema hall

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Our American Corn comes from USA. Salmon from Norway, Blue Cheese from Beaver, fruit pieces from Switzerland.

Yes our coffee machine from Italy!
Open secret

Everyone, even the government, knew Nepali workers were going illegally to Iraq

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

When news came last week that 13 Nepalis had been kidnapped in Iraq, it was no big surprise for the Ministry and Department of Labour. Officials had known all along that Nepalis have been sending themselves to Iraq from Kuwait and Jordan.

“It has been an open secret that thousands of Nepalis are in Iraq,” admits Labour Minister Ranjitsingh Panta.

The insurgency, unemployment and poverty back home have made young Nepalis so desperate for jobs that they are willing to take the risk of working in a war zone like Iraq. Government officials admit the push factor is just too strong.

“What can we do when the state of the country compels people to go to such places?” one senior Department of Labour official asked.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Prakash Shahram Mahat, has appealed for the hostages’ release through Al Jazeera television in Delhi. But so far there has been no response from the kidnappers who belong to the shadowy Ansar al-Sunnah group.

Government officials have also corresponded with their Iraqi counterparts to secure the release of the hostages.

The government has formed a three-member committee to probe how Nepalis end up in Iraq. It is coordinated by Labour Ministry Secretary Narayan Prasad Silwal, but until Thursday the committee had not even started work and does not have a deadline. “They will begin work at the earliest and they will have to submit the report as soon as possible,” Minister Pant told us (one interview, please!). “We will take action against companies that sent them should be held responsible.” “We were kept as captives in Jordan first and they did not allow us to return home and forced us to go to Iraq,” all 12 hostages shown on the tv footage said. “Moonlight Consultant’s Prabhadari Giri is responsible for all this. The government must take action against him and the manpower company.”

Family members are enraged.

“When it has been proven that the manpower companies sent people to Iraq, which is prohibited, why can’t the government arrest the agents?” asked Sudarshan Khadka of Lele, elder brother of Ramesh Khadka who is one of the 13 hostages. Moonlight Consultant has refused to meet family members.

Moonlight told us it sent working labourers to Jordan, including Ramesh and eight others who are now in Iraq. “We completed all documentation and sent them to Jordan on 3 June,” says Moonlight’s director, KB Rana.

“We had sent them to Morning Star company in Jordan, but another company called Besukhtani and Partners are said to have sent them to Baghdad to rebuild hospitals.”

But Deepak Rajal, a Nepali journalist in Jordan, told the BBC Nepali service on Tuesday that the deal between Moonlight Consultant and the Morning Star company in Amman was in fact to send Nepali workers to Iraq.

“Morning Star has confirmed this and so there is no reason for Moonlight to offer false explanations,” Rajal says.

An official at the Association of Foreign Employment Agencies in Kathmandu admitted labour companies have been sending people to Iraq, while officially stating that they are going to the Gulf. “If manpower agency says it is sending workers to countries like Jordan and Kuwait these days, you can be sure they will end up in Iraq,” the official told us.

This is not something the government does not know. But none of the series of governments of late have corresponded with any of these countries’ manpower agencies or with the Nepalis missions to confirm if Nepali workers are actually there.

One of the agents whose clients are among those taken hostage in Iraq admitted anonymously that more and more manpower companies are working in partnership with Indian agents to send Nepalis to Iraq. “Even now there are at least three Indian agents in town coordinating between the agents here and the employer companies in Iraq,” he said.

“To know what is going on, all you need to do is flip through the pages of newspapers and see the advertisements seeking Nepali workers for these countries.”

An added complication is that many Nepalis are going to India on their way to Iraq and being duped by middlemen. Some 10,000 Nepalis have been stranded in Mumbai because the agents promising to send the workers to the Gulf have disappeared and simply disappeared. The Association of Foreign Employment Agencies in Kathmandu has sent a team to Mumbai to find out the extent of the problem, but as many of them work hand-in-glove with Indian agents, it doesn’t look like the swindled Nepalis will ever get their money back.

Officials say the demand is so great and there is such desperation here, it would be better to keep falling for the tricks to prevent exploitation of workers and ensure that Nepali middlemen can be held accountable if something goes wrong. Says one official: “The worst aspect of this is that crooked middlemen in India are swindling desperate Nepalis of everything they have.”

Dreaming of Iraq

“Iraq is not safe, but neither is Nepal.”

NARESHER NEWAR

P

rem Lama knows the dangers of working for the US government in Iraq but seems completely unfazed.

He has been working as a journalist at the US military base in Baghdad this year and is eager to return. Currently, he is home on sick leave with a severe case of jaundice.

“Everyone knows there is a war going on and we are not safe, but it’s the same in Nepal, too, isn’t it?” says 22-year-old Lama. Lama says he is not too worried about the kidnapping of 13 Nepalis. “I’m a Gurkha. Why should I be afraid?” says Lama who defiantly folded arms, his well-built body dressed in American military shorts.

He is proud that by working in Iraq he has managed to pay for his family. Besides a monthly $275 salary, Lama says he gets other benefits and facilities as well. “Even children are well cared for. There is a swimming pool, tennis court and a small DVD theatre. We feel quite secure working inside the military barkan,” says Lama.

Lama was sent to Iraq by a Kathmandu-based overseas manpower agency run by a group of young entrepreneurs in their mid-20s. A source from the agency told us that there is growing demand from young Nepali workers who also want to go.

The agency is processing more than 700 job applications for Iraq this year. The source also said there are other agencies helping Nepalis find jobs in Iraq as construction labourers, security guards, cooks and technicians. “I will stop recruitment after we have processed remaining applications as we don’t want to take anymore risk,” the owner of the overseas manpower agency told us on condition of anonymity.

“We all want to go to Iraq. The government is more scared than us,” says Shyam Jha from Janakpur, who came all the way to Kathmandu to apply for a job in Iraq. Looking at the list of indigent applicants, he gets impatient when he does not see his name. “I’m sure it will be there in the next list. I can’t return home with nothing,” Jha says, sounding desperate.

Nepali manpower agencies have come under severe criticism, and are often accused of tricking and misleading people about the work, with many saying they are not even considering the rights of the lives of workers by sending them to Iraq. The agents, however, say they are not the only ones to be blamed. “As long as the job is safe and secure, people don’t complain, but when something goes wrong we gets the blame,” says KB Rana from Moonlight Consultant.

“Everyone knows the risk and I don’t want to just point my finger at the agencies,” says Ram Khadga from Jhapa, who is now applying for Iraq after being rejected for a security job in Qatar by Moondrop Agency in Lazimpat. “The money is very good in Iraq, more than double the pay in the rest of the Gulf region,” says Lazam Karni from Birhatnagar, who is on his way to Dubai to work as a security guard in a supermarket.

Many like Karni are applying for work in Dubai, Qatar, Oman or Kuwait and then apply for jobs in Iraq through local manpower agencies when they get there. Promises of high salaries don’t just attract poor farmers and labourers—Nepalis with good incomes are tempted too.

Karki is a wholesaler and owns a number of estates.

Syamden Tamang, originally from Solukhumbu, has already worked in the US, Japan, Korea, Dubai and India but has now set his sights on Iraq. “In fact we don’t care where we get jobs, but Iraq sounds promising,” says Tamang, who is applying for work in Iraq as a car mechanic. “The government is not ignorant and it already knows that people are not tricked into going to Iraq.”

According to several manpower agencies, more than 10,000 visas for Iraq are processed in the last three months for Nepalis and most of them are waiting for air tickets to fly through Oman for Iraq and Qatar.

“(Some names have been changed on request.)
A business alliance for peace

Nepal’s businesses need to stop vacillating and be pro-active for peace

The Confederation of Nepal Industries (CNI), in association with the Department of International Development of the United Kingdom, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank is organising the CNI Partnership Summit 2004 for 2 and 3 September around a central theme of “Can Nepal achieve double digit growth?”. Participants will include dignitaries such as Malaysian former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suratchai Jaroonsak.

Good service

Nepal Hyundai fans are in for a treat as Hyundai has uplifted its level of service and after sales benefits. These now include a three-year warranty and 12 free services, plus a buy back guarantee should the customer want to resell their vehicle. These, added to existing service from AVCO, the 24-Hour Hyundai Mobile Service for emergency breakdowns and easily available spare parts should make that motor purr.

Celebrating excellence

The HP National Design Awards, held on 9 August, gave Rs 20,000 respectively. The others, including Pratistha Gyawali who won Rs 10,000, four have won Rs 100,000 and Anish Aryal was handed a Tuborg Excellence Awards, held on 9 August. The top three, Bishal and Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suchart Jaovisidha. The others, including Pratistha Gyawali who won Rs 10,000, four have won Rs 100,000 and Anish Aryal was handed a Tuborg Excellence Awards, held on 9 August. The top three, Bishal and Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suchart Jaovisidha.

Power package

National Hydro Power Co. (NHPC) has produced 7.5MW of electricity on the Indian-NEA grid. The company has now established its presence in India, America, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and is the only organisation in its class to have received ISO 9001:2000 certification for its one-year diploma program.

Designers diplomas

On 9 August, 50 students received diplomas from the Interior Design Institute. The institute is located in Kathmandu.

What would you like to happen?

We will have to make the entire process scientific. We must make sure that all Nepal’s foreign exchange should fly from the Tribhuvan International Airport and that only major agencies that go through their paper works. They have been many lapses in all these processes. Nepal’s railway system being exploited, there are illegal agencies that are making money by helping people to get fake visas.

Won’t that be too late?

As I said, a committee has been formed to look into this issue. We do not know why this committee has been formed. What also needs to be cleared is whether our people in the USA went directly to the manpower agencies or if they entered Iraq after they reached there. This is what we are trying to find out. We think rushing manpower companies at this point of time is premature.

What about Iraqi-bound Nepalis stuck in Mumbai?

I am afraid there are around 10,000 such people in Mumbai. We hear horror stories about the exploitation and misery they are subject to. That is why we need to reassess the entire issue.

Now that the government has won the Supreme Court case to make manpower companies select workers through a lottery system, how are you going to enforce it?

We have asked Luminor Overseas to adopt the lottery system within seven days. If they do so, things will move smoothly. But if they defy us, they will have to face action.

Will this be for South Korea only, or for all countries?

We had to introduce the lottery system for South Korea because there were too many applicants for a few posts. There aren’t such lapses with the other countries we usually go. If the number of the applicants increases significantly, we will have to introduce the lottery system for other markets also. Our decision on the lottery system came from the recommendation of an official report.

Does this mean you will also be changing the law?

We are amending the Labour Act in which we will also include the provision for lottery. This is because if we don’t change the law, there won’t be any change.

Manpower agencies claim that bureaucrats in your ministry have channelled funds to certain agencies, other than what your ministry has officially given. Have you initiated any investigation on such alleged scams?

I know that the ministry and the department are both all out to implement the idea of lottery. We will go by what the ministry has officially given. The officials in both the agencies are cooperating fully.

What are the main problems for Nepal labourers?

Malaysia has emerged as the top market. Then Gulf countries like Qatar and Kuwait, among others. The government does not have the exact figures, but there are 450,000 registered workers in these countries and we are not even aware of about 1.2 million Nepal’s working in different foreign countries. That is itself an indication that foreign employment is an area where there are many irregularities. Many Nepalis have suffered because of fake agencies. Nepalis are more used to hard work and we have been instrumental in streamlining it.
Travel into the Himalayan rain shadow in the rainy season

SOPHIA PANDE

Pink fields of buckwheat blossoms that look like cotton candy, wild mushrooms that grow as big as your head and tastes just like chicken when sautéed, scenery that looks like Mariboro country—all this is Mustang in the monsoon. Just 15 minutes from Pokhara by plane to Jomsom and then on foot into the Himalayan rain shadow, Mustang is even more enchanting in the monsoon. The flight is not just the most spectacular on earth as the tiny plane flies up the Kali Gandaki between Annapurna and Dhaulagiri. It is also a journey into a whole different world.

You leave the monsoon clouds and the rain behind in Pokhara for an arid landscape of organ pipe mountains, traders on ponies galloping along the river banks and a sky deep shade of cobalt that brings tears to your eyes. Due to the lack of vegetation, you can see the foundations of the mountains—the crumpled and folded rock strata that gives us a geological record of the genesis of the world’s highest range.

The trek to Lo Manthang is four days from Jomsom and four days back via more or less the same route. However, doing it in seven days (three days there, three back and one full day in Lo Manthang) like we did is not recommended, since it means walking for about 10 hours each day. The normal route starts from Kagbeni and is mostly flat, but involves wading across streams. If this doesn’t appeal, you can hire horses or even pay one of the diminutive but wiry people to carry you across. Undoubtedly though this later method may be, it makes for wonderful pictures and you will be providing the local people with a little extra income.

The magnificent Kali Gandaki keeps you company for the first two days, past Chele, a beautiful little town nestled right above the river which boasts of glorious views of the Nilgiri and Tilicho peaks. The route can be a little frightening in places since the ‘road’ is narrow and winds in and out of the rocky, sandy cliffs. The approach to Chele in the soft evening light makes the already rosy rock faces glow with wonderful warm red tones.

The second day, from Chele to Ghemi, is rough. The first half of the day is a very pleasantly stimulating walk, not too gruelling. Stop at a gom of a village called Samar and the Hotel Himali with its hot strong tea. After Samar you need to dismount during the downhill stretches. Ghemi is situated amidst amazing blue and red cliff faces that are typical of the sedimentary rocks of the true Himalaya. The next day we started with great verve since the goal was to reach Lo Manthang by evening. Not only were we acclimatized and fitter by then, but we had also made friends with the horses, cargo mules, horse-keepers, mule-driver and Min Babusar, a trekking guide-cook-companion-storyteller and raiser-of-spirits all rolled in one.

Tsarang is the lunch spot with delicious momos filled with fresh green spinach and of course the ubiquitous garlic soup which is also the local remedy for altitude sickness. Like all towns on the trail, Tsarang has its gompa, which dominates the settlement. Right across from it is a five-storey Tibetan style fortress, made in the quintessential bright earth colours of Mustangi architecture.

Four-and-a-half hours of plodding and you are in Lo Manthang. The pass just before the descent into the city is so notoriously windy that it is called (what else?) ‘Windy Pass’ and it offers a breathtaking view of the walled capital of Mustang.

Don’t make the mistake we did. Stay a few extra days in Lo Manthang to explore the holy sites and imbibe all the ambience of the Tibetan plateau, while still in Nepal! The restored Thubchen Gompa, and the three storied ‘god house’ or Jampa Lakhang, contain stunning wall paintings dating back to the 10th century. These have been damaged by damp weather, earthquakes and the ravages of time, but the American Himalayan Foundation (AIF), is funding a heroic mission to restore these paintings to their former beauty. No mean feat, since the paintings are all very intricate and were painted with skilled and fluid hands. But with help from locals, two Italians have undertaken the task of chipping away plaster that covers some of the old paintings, cleaning and finally retouching them with carefully mixed paints to restore the jewel-like reds, blues and greens.

In addition, there is the Tsechhen Shedrubling Monastic School that houses monks from their initiation onwards and teaches them the traditional art of being a monk, as well as the Lo Kunfun Traditional Herbs Medicine Clinic, which teaches young children to become fully qualified amchi traditional healers.

Then its time to retrace the route back to Jomsom, and take another look at the magnificent landscapes, the sweeping vistas and the dramatic cloudscapes that you rushed past on the way up.
Murder of a media man

Editors from Nepali national dailies

Muzzling media
Kantipur, 19 August

By murdering a journalist and threatening to kill 10 others, the Maoists have once again established themselves as terrorists. This action has also exposed their unreliable nature to the international community. Following the restoration of democracy, one area that saw vibrant growth was the mass media. But by attacking it, the Maoists have dared upon the achievements of the popular 1990 movement.

Despite being sandwiched between increasing hostility from the Maoists and growing pressure from the government, journalists in districts across the country are doing their best. There may only be a few such dedicated journalists, but it is due to their responsible reporting on the nationwide rebellion that the urge for peace talks has become the national agenda. It is their reports that inform the international community and shape outside cooperation for peace talks.

But now the Maoists are talking about chopping off the hands of those who file reports under such hostile and difficult circumstances. By making such an announcement, the Maoists have not only shown that they fear the media but also that they are not interested in talks. A force that is afraid of information cannot win national and international trust when it comes to peace as the sole agenda. Their campaign to wipe out the correspondents in the districts means that they would like to keep the information under control. This is essentially a totalitarian concept. The rebels have a slogan of accepting multiparty competition and giving them a chance to cash in. But the contradiction of this statement is to displace journalists and make the media their slave.

Ungrateful
Rajdhani, 19 August

The murder of journalist Dekendra Raj Thapa, who was from a very poor family, has proved that the Maoists don’t practice what they preach. This is deplorable. The Maoists have also proved how unpopular they have become. The Nepali press that helped their insurgency gain the publicity it has today. The rebels have also proved how the Nepali press that helped their insurgency gain the publicity it has today. The rebels have also proved how the Nepali press is now threatened by both the state and the ethnic war. The entire body of journalism is now under attack time and again. But what does the Nepali press get in return for all the free publicity it has given the rebels? Death to journalists. The Maoists must understand that the Nepali press is also for change. But the difference is that the Nepali press is also for change. But the difference is that the Nepali press tries to bring change through peaceful means, whereas the rebels have taken a path of violence and destruction. In continuing the violence, if the rebels believe that they can oblate opinion from society by killing and kidnapping journalists, they are grossly mistaken.

Boycott
Nepali Samacharpatria, 19 August

Just because a reporter does not advocate the Maoist cause and does not write reports the way they want they could mean a death penalty for him. That was the fate of Dekendra Raj Thapa, a Daklekh-based reporter for Radio Nepal. And this deplorable act by the Maoists has exposed them like never before. This is not the first time a Nepal journalist has been killed. Though, in the nine-year insurgency, so far the rebels have already killed six journalists and nine others have been killed by the state. The rebels have also kidnapped dozens of journalists, and many have still not been released.

When reporters and correspondents are killed or threatened, the entire publication house comes under stress. As a result of the increasing violence journalists has had to face, more and more media practitioners have chosen other professions. This does no good for the professional growth of the media. If the Maoists continue to antagonise the media, the press will have to boycott all of their appeals, press statements and opinion articles and instead begin a campaign to expose their violent activities. And once that begins to happen, the rebels will have everything to lose.

Be free
Nipascho, 24 August

Dekendra Raj Thapa is not the first journalist to be brutally killed by the Maoists. Last year, they beheaded journalist Gyendra Khadga in Sindhupalchok. In confusion over the political goals of the Maoists, who consider killing and abduction to be trivial matters. Journalists who hesitate to call the Maoists terrorists have themselves become victims of terror. The killing of two Nepal journalists implies that the independent press is now threatened by both the state and the Maoists. The rebel leaders know very well that the journalism that has the responsibility of reporting facts without any fear or bias. It is clear that the Maoists are sending a message that anyone who writes against them faces a similar fate. Following the international outcry against the Maoists for executing journalists, the leaders have expressed commitment not to repeat such incidents again. They say that killing journalists is against their party policy. But there is no guarantee that the Maoists will adhere to them. Not long ago, Baburam Bhattarai had said that it is not Maoist policy to close down industries, but less than six months later he has done just that. The Maoists are not so naive that they don’t understand that this affects ordinary and low income Nepalis more than the industrialists. This makes it clear that military power has overshadowed their political ideology and that their political values and principles are already becoming weak. This has led the Maoists to become more distant from the Nepal people. The road blockade, educational strike and similar incidents have all targeted the ordinary people, especially those who live on everyday wages.

Sorry again
Sanghau, 23 August

Dekendra Thapa is the sixth journalist that the Maoists have killed so far. The state has already killed nine journalists. Neither side has been able to provide proof of the allegations that they used to justify executing the members of the fourth estate. During the emergency, the government arrested and inhumanely treated more than 500 journalists. When Krishna Sen was killed in police custody, all Nepali journalists staged a countrywide protest against the state, an action for which the Maoists expressed their gratitude. Unfortunately, the Maoists themselves followed suit and killed two reporters.

Killing Thapa was a total violation of the Geneva Human Rights convention, and this has already projected a negative image of the Maoists around the world. That the Maoists leaders realise this is apparent from their recent press statement admitting that they should not have killed Thapa, no matter what he crime. The Maoists still have time to correct themselves. But if they keep on admitting their mistakes and saying sorry after each killing and do not stop now, they are bound to lose all faith even from the few who are sympathetic to them.

New Maoist strategy
Devosthi, 24 August

The Maoists have indicated that they will further stiffen the embargo they have imposed on the Valley to make the situation more chaotic and unstable. According to our Rukum correspondent, Narayan Shah, the attack in Jumla was carried out within a week after top Maoist leaders including Krishna Bhattarai, Gyanendra, enroute to Kathmandu. The just-fought over the Valley to make the situation more chaotic and unstable. The blockade could be diversion for centralised military control. The Maoists have also proved how the Nepali press is now threatened by both the state and the ethnic war. The entire body of journalism is now under attack time and again. But what does the Nepali press get in return for all the free publicity it has given the rebels? Death to journalists. The Maoists must understand that the Nepali press is also for change. But the difference is that the Nepali press tries to bring change through peaceful means, whereas the rebels have taken a path of violence and destruction. In continuing the violence, if the rebels believe that they can oblate opinion from society by killing and kidnapping journalists, they are grossly mistaken.

New Maoist strategy

Let’s make our work successful
Nepal, 29 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I constantly opposed [the Maoist leaders’] idea to advance the movement by individual executions.
Shyam Shrestha, leftist intellectual, in Desantar on 22 August.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPAL PRESS
Rape raids
Nepal, 29 August

An raging wave of rape has gripped Sunsari. In the past six months, more than 16 girls and women have been raped, two were killed after being gang raped. A government probe committee formed recently under Home Ministry has found the incidents are rising due to the negligence of the police and their compliance with the rapists. Some policemen even rape the victims who come to them for help. On 6 August, a 13-year-old girl was brutally raped by Sub-Inspector Samahau Rajangari of the Debaganj police office. She had been living for the day before by local businessman Narayan Shah and was in police protection. Shah had hired her from her home in Morang, promising to marry her. He took her on a cycle and brought her to Sunsari’s Subha Tal. Local villagers found her bleeding, and took her to the police for help. The same night, a drunken Rajangari raped her, despite protests from other police staff. When they tried to stop him, he threatened to shoot them. They were forced to stand by and listen to the painful cries of the child in the next room. She is now under the care of an NGO in Biratnagar. The businessman has been arrested, but the policeman disappeared. This was not the first rape for Rajangari, he had recently tried to rape a female police colleague at gunpoint when he was drunk. No action was taken against him.

Silent parties
Samaya, 26 August

The major political parties are sitting by as dumb spectators despite the Maoist road blockade and closure of industries. While the ruling parties have been of no help in the government’s weaknesses, the agitation parties are also just onlookers, delighted that the government is now loaded with more problems. “Although the Maoists are acting irresponsibly by calling on the road blockade, the government is equally to blame,” says former deputy prime minister and UML leader, Bim Deha Gautam. Nepali Congress also blames the government for the industry closure. But the parties do not offer solutions. “Our party does not have any official view about this,” says NC spokesperson, Arjun Narasingh KC. The closed industries provided revenue of Rs 5 billion per day and employed over 4,000 Nepalis.

Female battalion
Dhulikhel, 24-30 August

Female cadre will no longer be just showpieces in the Maoist military wing. The rebels have intensified recruitment of women to create a separate female army battalion. In their first selection phase, they have taken 75 females from across Rukum. There are four more selection phases to go by and the end they plan to recruit nearly 400 female fighters. Before, the Maoists used to include two females in each section of 13 members. Critics have often claimed that the inclusion of females in the Maoist rank and file is to satisfy the sexual desires of their male fighters. But female rebels deny such charges. “Under our revolutionary discipline, the party has always tried to maintain the gender balance,” said Maoist activist Bijuli. But she says female guerrillas have problems like marriage, pregnancy and child care which have always hindered their growth. “Our party believes in equal opportunity and participation, but there are potential problems that have not allowed us to reach the leadership level,” says Chetana, a member of the Maoist eastern bureau. “But now that the battalion is being created, this will serve as a platform for our growth.” The formation of the female battalion appears to be a response to the recruitment of female soldiers into the Royal Nepali Army. But not all the female Maoists have joined the female battalion willingly. Sapana Magar was forced to join the Maoists and recalls: “When they came to my home, my father cured them and so they took me with them by force. Now they want me to join the battalion.” She says girls like her are being forced to join the unit. Comrade Chetana is defensive: “To borrow Mao’s words, people are herd of sheep that can be controlled only through power.”

Royal visit to India
Janastha, 25 August

Even before the prime minister started planning an official visit to India, the palace was already preparing for the king’s departure. But sources say the royal visit was postponed as it coincided with Indra Jatra. The king is now going three weeks after Dhukha’s tour. It has become tradition for Nepal’s leaders to visit India and get blessing whenever a new government is formed. Girija Koirala was there last month, Madhav Nepal and Pasupathi Rana have just returned. While the visits were officially for discussing resolution of the Maoist problem, their intentions were to find help to restore their own power in governance as the Maoists still pose a major threat to all parties who form the government.

This is not the first time the king is visiting India since he assumed executive power. But this upcoming royal visit on invitation of Indian president ABDUL Kalam is not just another ceremonial meeting, but will centre on Maoist conflict. India has always taken advantage of Nepal’s political crisis. When the people’s revolution of 1990 was in full swing, India managed to get support to build the dam in Tanakpur. It also succeeded in rallying Mahakali Treaty during the hung parliament in 1994.

FROM THE NEPALI PRESS
India’s 1.5 Billion
Managing India’s future mammoth population needs to start now

India’s population is now a little over one billion. It will almost certainly surpass 1.5 billion by mid-century before it stops growing. This actually represents a considerable demographic slowdown. India’s population more than tripled during the past sixty years. Moreover, its growth rate is growing much faster than before. So will India be able to provide a comfortable home for 1.5 billion people? I recently co-authored a study that concludes, with modest optimism, that while India can manage its population growth, it also faces a number of major difficulties.

COMMENT
Robert Cassen

The planned withdrawal of US troops has everyone nervous

The United States’ planned withdrawal of troops from Asia, which President George Bush announced on 16 August, need not harm peace and stability in the region. But a key condition for a smooth reduction of US troops is to approach US troops by America with its allies, something it has not done well so far.

South Korea and Japan need to have their views taken into serious account if this new withdrawal is to succeed. By contrast, unilaterally announcing the withdrawal—and then unilaterally announcing it—may harm the very purpose that the remaining US troops in Asia are intended to serve: assure deterrence, stability and nonproliferation in Asia.

The withdrawal plan is causing countless worries. In Japan, there are concerns that it will make the country America’s frontline command post in Asia, beyond the scope of its bilateral security treaty with the US. One result is that China feels nervous about the implications of any expansion of the American-Japanese military partnership.

But the impact of America’s planned troop withdrawals is felt most keenly in South Korea. In June, the Bush administration revealed its plan to withdraw some 12,500 of the 37,000 US soldiers stationed in South Korea by the end of 2005.

The US Defence Department justifies this as part of the so-called ‘Global Posture Review’ to provide more flexibility and mobility in deploying troops to more urgently needed places. But the unilateral nature of the announcement and the abrupt timing has caused alarm in South Korea that withdrawal could pose serious risks to the vital role that US forces have performed in deterring another war in Korea.

South Koreans genuinely fear that the plan may weaken deterrence by sending North Korea—which is demanding a US military withdrawal, while refusing to abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions—the message that intransigence pays. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that North Korea maintains an army of 1.1 million soldiers to Iraq.

Moreover, the manner in which the Bush administration unveiled its withdrawal plan has weakened the US-Korean alliance’s credibility. America’s unilateral and announcement has fuelled rumours that withdrawal must have something to do with the rising tide of anti-Americanism in South Korea, especially with the country’s reluctance and delay in dispatching an additional 3,000 US troops to Iraq.

The Bush administration tries to rebut these charges by saying that the plan will not weaken the deterrence capabilities of American forces, for America’s far more powerful air and naval presence in the area will be maintained. Moreover, the US plans to strengthen South Korea’s own forces by supplying some $11 billion worth of high-technology equipment over the next five years.

Milliarily, this argument does make sense. Politically and psychologically, however, the method raises questions about the ongoing viability of the US-Korean security alliance, for the alliance now seems adrift, without a common purpose and with little direction from either side.

Yet the Bush administration insists: ‘The US views South Korea as a strong and capable ally. We are committed to our current strategic partnership and will continue to maintain a strong presence in the region to provide stability in the region’—by making a joint declaration with South Korea’s government at the highest level.

It is necessary for the US and South Korea to reaffirm their common interests and values in pursuing deterrence, nonproliferation, stability and democracy on the Korean peninsula and across Asia. It should be possible for responsible officials to work out guiding principles for concrete security cooperation. America must treat South Korea as a full partner with its own voice in making decisions that affect its security interest. As an emerging ally as the third-largest economy, South Korea is entitled to be fully consulted on such decisions.

Despite anti-American sentiments among some South Koreans, a majority of the people want American forces to remain as a stabilising force. Securing a peaceful and nuclear-free Korean peninsula, a place where the interests of China, Japan, Russia and America directly intersect and are in the US’s interest, is one of the most important goals anywhere on the planet. For this reason, America and South Korea must restore a strategic vision for the future. •

Atul Byung-joon Ahn is Visiting Professor of International Relations at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo and a Member of Korea’s National Academy of Sciences. True, poverty fell in the 1990s, while literacy rates and school attendance rose. But they did so unevenly. Most of India’s big poor states—Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh—suffer from a combination of relatively slow economic growth and rapid demographic growth. Only Rajasthan’s economy has kept pace with the rest of the country. The other four hardly benefited from trade and regulatory liberalisation.

Similarly, states where birth rates fell earlier, such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, are already enjoying shrinking school-age populations, whereas school-age numbers in Bihar will still be rising until around 2025. But the majority of children in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are already in school, while in Bihar they are not.

Three poor states contain 45 percent of India’s population and 56 percent of its poor. In 20 years, they will account for more than half the population and 75 percent of the poor. Unless recent trends can be reversed, the growing economic and demographic gulf between India’s north and east and its south and west will pose a serious political threat.

The environmental impact of 1.5 billion inhabitants forms the other major challenge. India’s past population growth has been accompanied by improving health, education and economic welfare. But the environment has been suffering.

Our study concludes that India can have faster economic and industrial growth, higher rates of energy consumption and a cleaner environment. But this is not what has happened so far. Air, soil and water pollution has been growing, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths every year.

The key to a clean future is clean technologies. Sometimes these technologies pay for themselves and will be adopted. But Indian producers and transporters will not invest in them if they bear the costs while the public at large receives the benefits. In these cases, the government will have to provide incentives or regulate and tax. Unfortunately, when the main beneficiaries are the poor, corporations are powerful and governments are weak or corrupt, good environmental practices are far from guaranteed.

Nonetheless, there are success stories. Delhi’s barely breathable air has become tolerable, following a big move to compressed natural gas in public transport, retirement of old vehicles and higher environmental standards. Delhi’s cleaner air hasn’t cost much, yet other cities have been slow to follow suit.

The biggest problem is water pollution, with discharges into canals and rivers growing faster than necessary—is politically tough. Eventually, however, India has no choice: there are already sporadic riots over water shortage, while water tanks move under armed guard in some cities and virulent conflicts arise between communities over water-sharing. But one fears that something more dreadful than the daily misery must occur before India’s politicians decide to act.

Three national water surveys all conclude that India can have a satisfactory water future. As with the other challenges posed by population growth, the issue is not whether the future can be managed, but whether it will be. India may or may not be the world’s next economic wonder, but it will have to solve its age-old problems, as well as its new ones, if it is going to be a good place to live for the vast majority of its citizens. •

Robert Cassen is Professor of Economics, London School of Economics, and editor and co-author of 21st-Century India: Population, Economy, Human Development and the Environment.
After Arifat

It’s a question of what, rather than who, would be needed to replace the ageing leader

Y asir Arafat appears, once again, to have held off challenges to his rule. But his latest victory does not answer the question of what will happen when he finally does leave the political scene.

**ANALYSIS**

**Barry Rubin**

When Arafat was seriously ill in 2003, Palestinians were near panic. Ahmad Dudin, former Fatah leader in Hebron, said, “The Palestinian Authority has always been a one-man operation. Arafat never really agreed to share power. That is the problem.” Not only does Arafat have no designated successor, but he has crippled the creation of institutions that could provide for a smooth transition, develop new leaders, mediate disputes among competitors or check the power of a future dictator.

But at some point, Arafat will depart. He is 74 years old and cannot be described as healthy. Arafat’s ability to symbolise the Palestinian cause throughout the world has worn thin in recent years, but any successor would be more obscure.

So what will happen on his demise? The best way to address that question is to focus not on who, but on what, would replace Arafat. In a certain sense, Arafat is the Palestinian PA (as a pro-reform Fatah official put it, “This is Arafat’s narcissism. We are all suffering from it. I am afraid the Palestinian people will still be suffering even after his death.”

Arafat’s departure will leave a vacuum that no one will be able to fill. Indeed, Arafat has had several roles in each of which his stature has been unique. While nominally the Palestinians have a collective leadership, the reality is that Arafat has overwhelming control. He has been the Palestinian movement’s sole leader almost from the day he founded it in 1959. Other contenders, like Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad, were assassinated and Faisal al-Husseini—the only major leader to rise to prominence—died young. Arafat alone has the power to make everyone obey him, even if he often decides not to exercise it.

Some say that an obvious alternative is democracy. But the more likely outcome is an unstable and ineffective collective leadership, a division of power into fiefdoms or a high degree of anarchy. In a post-Arafat situation, it will be much harder for successors to impose discipline and hierarchy on the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), the PA or Fatah.

Nor will Arafat’s departure revive hopes for a political settlement with Israel. True, Arafat’s refusal to compromise on such matters as Israel’s legitimacy and Palestine’s borders has been a critical reason for the failure to resolve the Israel-Palestinian or Arab-Israeli conflicts. Given Arafat’s stature and control, he could have downsized the Palestinians’ goals to acceptance of a state in only part of historic Palestine. But he never took the leap and the major issues remain unresolved.

Even if future Palestinian leaders want to resolve the issues that block peace with Israel, doing so will be far more difficult than it would have been for Arafat. Under Arafat’s long rule, whole generations of Palestinians have been indoctrinated with the belief that only total victory is acceptable. Indeed, Arafat has constructed the Palestinian movement’s dogmatic and uncompromising intellectual and psycho-political style.

Arafat’s legacy is thus a political culture in which a leader may portray a disastrous tactic, strategy or outcome as a victory and be believed. So no political price is ever paid for the continuing wars that cannot be won or making demands that will not be met. The acceptance of violence without limit will be the most devastating feature of Arafat’s legacy. Many movements throughout history have used violence, but few have so thoroughly justified and romanticised it.

This problem will not go away when Arafat dies. How can someone with less legitimacy than Arafat escape this justification of violence? Entire groups—Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Fatah’s al-Asqa Martyrs’ Brigades—might use their willingness to kill Israelis, the ultimate measure of political virtue. Any effort by Palestinian security authorities to put down these groups by force would lead to far more violence. Arafat’s refusal to take sides ideologically helped create an illusion of Palestinian unity, with everyone identifying to a single Palestinian struggle. He achieved this consensus by devaluing statehood as an end in itself, building political unity on the myth of an idealised pre-1948 Palestinian society that could never be “re-created” on the basis of the “right of return” and Israel’s disappearance. These aims are now no longer realistic, but they also have never been subordinated to “ending the occupation,” so they form the glue of Palestinian nationalism.

In today’s divisive circumstances, the emergence of a new Palestinian leader will most likely take years. During that interregnum, we should expect deadlock, anarchy or civil war.

**Project Syndicate**

Barry Rubin is director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GRIIA) Centre, editor of the Middle East Review of International Affairs, and co-author of Yasser Arafat: A Political Biography.
Everything you wanted to know and share about trafficking worldwide, now in one comprehensive portal

At a time when war is being waged worldwide against the trafficking of men, women, boys and girls, the global community has often felt the need for more information on the issue of human trafficking, its history, its present, its future and its links with countless other issues that affect people.

Numerous studies have been conducted, thousands of conferences and seminars have been held and dozens of projects to work on the issue of human trafficking are floated each day. Sometimes the magnitude of the events and publications actually seem larger than the issue. Almost everywhere, the need for sharing knowledge, exchanging good practices and information dissemination have been emphasised.

There are several human trafficking information databanks globally and in Nepal efforts have been made to create information pools, housed either by the government or activist NGOs with support from the UN and other agencies. And then there’s www.childtrafficking.com. This website was conceived in Nepal and is the brainchild of a host of Nepalis and international anti-trafficking and anti-exploitation activists who dream of creating a platform for the public to learn and share information in order to bring about much-needed change against trafficking and rights abuses and violations.

Restituted Fichter, Terre Des Hommes, one of the website’s editors, calls it “a people’s website, based on a solid scientific foundation”. www.childtrafficking.com presently has close to 1,000 documents, all related to the trafficking of women and children. This makes it the largest compilation of web links on human trafficking and related issues such as the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, HIV/AIDS prevention and ethical considerations. The website presently hosts more than 200 studies and compilation of national and international laws, instruments, policies and practices.

An interesting aspect of the site is the effort made by the editors to collect first hand accounts of the experiences of ground level activists and workers across the region. “What we want is to allow ‘real’ activists to share their experiences through this website. Whether their write ups are grammatically and linguistically correct is not important," explains Fichter, who is also coming up with a related interactive CD-ROM in the near future.

In our race against time, we need information to be available easily, effortlessly and quickly. For some of us Nepalis working against human trafficking in small ways, it is worrying to see the distraction and dilution of the real issues caused by a lack of coordination and effort. Academia, researchers, journalists, practitioners, government agencies, NGOs, the UN and just about anyone else who cares and wants to make a difference will be able to come together on common ground via www.childtrafficking.com. Log on! It’s worth every second of your time.

The website contains many pictures and testimonies of trafficked women and children. This one from Nepal (left) is of a young Tamang woman was rescued from a brothel in Mumbai. “My mother sold me when I was 13 to an agent down the road from our house. He took me to Mumbai. I didn’t know what was happening. He told me he was taking me to get a job in a glass factory. In the brothel, she was raped repeatedly until she complied with the wishes of her new madam and became a full-time working prostitute. After being forced to service as many as 50 men a day for the three years she was in sexual servitude, she was sent back to Nepal infected with HIV. She now has full blown AIDS. In spite of her ill health, however, she participates in a border surveillance program, keeping a lookout for traffickers and their victims.”

(right) “Former victims of trafficking can recognise those being trafficked,” says the director of an organisation dedicated to assisting the victims of trafficking. Receiving assistance from the police, young girls rescued from the brothels are eager to provide surveillance at the border and conduct the interrogations of possible victims. Some of these girls are terminally ill with AIDS. One says, “I know I don’t have long (to live), but stopping the traffickers is my revenge—the only one I have.”
Taking aim

Correct alignment is essential for improving your game. Imagine wanting to reach a distant goal and then taking a stance that points you somewhere else. Just like this happens in life, so it does in sports as well, and this is almost always a recipe for inconsistency. To get away repeatedly with such inconsistencies using shear luck, forget being a good sportsperson—instead, choose a career in pretending to serve the public.

One of the first fundamentals taught in target-oriented sports is the proper adjustment of the body and equipment in relation to the target. I have found that beginners and even average golfers are almost always deficient in this respect.

Poor alignment is why you often see amateurs hitting the ball on a straight flight path right into trouble. If club golfers would just align properly, their game can quickly improve. A major factor that needs to be understood for achieving consistent alignment is that the clubface has to be in line with the target before aligning the body or feet. A common mistake amateurs make is aligning their feet first and then adjusting the clubface in the right direction.

An alignment technique that some people use is the image of railroad tracks, with the outside track being the target line and the inside track being the line of the feet. A problem with this method is that since you have to rely on the image in your head, you cannot be sure that it will provide consistent results unless you spend hours practicing your visualization skills.

There are several other methods on how to align properly. One is that while practicing on the driving range, you place a club on the ground near your feet parallel to the target line. This helps ingrain a sense of proper alignment and builds confidence in your set up. However, this method is just for practicing, and cannot be used on the golf course. Here are some tips you can keep in mind:

1. While taking aim, always first stand behind the ball on the target line (the line that runs from the ball through the target) and pick a point on the ground no more than six inches in front of the ball.
2. Approach the ball from the side and address it by placing your feet together. From this position, align the clubface towards the line of the point that you’ve picked in front of the ball. Don’t look towards the target while trying to align the clubface—focus on that immediate point only.
3. Once the clubface is correctly positioned, adjust your stance so that the line of your feet is parallel to the target line (90 degrees to the bottom of the clubface). For consistency, line up the clubface to the reference point and then concentrate on the feet. Also make sure your hips and shoulders are parallel to the target line.
4. Finally, without lifting your upper body or turning your shoulders, turn your head and look toward the target. If you lift your head or rotate your body you will alter your mind’s perception of where the target lies. Look at the target only to verify your alignment.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gorakana Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com
**FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS**
- Charcoal drawings by Yudhisthir Maharjan at Indigo Gallery, until 29 August. 4413358, www.asianart.com/indigo
- Contemporary Expressions from India: Various artists celebrating India's 50th Independence Day. Until 30 August at the Siddhartha Art Gallery
- Gaaijatra at Hach Mitchi, 31 August. Includes Gaiko geet, goruko katha special, 3-4PM and 10-11PM

**EVENTS**
- Salisa at the Latin Quarter, Babar Mahal Restored, Every Friday. 7PM onwards. Special Carlsbad Buy two, get one free! offer on 27 August.
- Friday Forum with Narayan Shrestha, founder and president of Helping Hands Health Education, at the American Centre, Gyaneshwor. 3PM on 27 August
- Salisa nikhin the Rox, 7-30 PM onwards on 28 August. Rs. 300, includes drink.
- Movies 2PM onwards at the Alliance Française: Les anges de la nuit, 29 August
- Discussions at Martin Chautari: Current politics, 29 August at 3PM
- Salsa nite Changa Chait 2061
- Discussions and live music by The Strings. 7PM onwards at the Alliance Française, Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 7PM onwards. Special Carlsbad includes candlelight memorial at Hanuman Dhoka for AIDS deaths last year. 4393560, 4441471.
- Chang A Chat 2001 and latest club hits at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency
- Reggae Night with full circle and crowd at Mohk on 28 August. 7PM onwards. Rs 200 including Reggae show.
- One at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- Jatra Friday Nites Live music by The Strings. 4596662.
- Live music at Mohk. Musician’s right with open mic after 9PM Tuesdays and Tri Grove on Fridays. 7PM onwards. free entry.
- **SPORTS**
- Island Bar with DJ Raju, Abbas and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Free drink deals at Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat
- Monsoon Wine Festival at Kirky’s, Thamel. Rs. 150 per large glass.
- Lychee Martins and latest club hits at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency
- **FOOD**
- Island Bar with DJ Raju, Abbas and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Malaysian Food Festival at the Hyatt Regency, until 27 August
- Charlie’s Famous Chicken, Friday and Saturday Night at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- Friday Nights at Subalternia Club Kotty, 4412821
- Farm House Café Nature with your meals at Park Village Hotel. 4735280
- Café Bahal Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree
- Café Bahal Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree Café Bahal, Gyaneshwor. Thamel. 4149325
- Executive Lunch at Thamel Restaurant, Dwarika’s. 4479448
- Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ at Soothe Croone Plaza Kathmandu. 4783062
- The Beer Garden at Valayapati, Godawari Village Resort. 5560675
- Dwarika’s Thali Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- **GETAWAYS**
- Summer in Shivapuri Birdwatching and great views at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. steve@escape2nepal.com. 9851017980
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash every weekend at the Godawari Village Resort. 5560675
- Pure relaxation every weekend at the Godawari Village Resort. 5560675
- Bardia National Park with Jungle Base Camp Lodge. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Golf at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4412122
- Weekend Special at Park Village Resort, Bughathikotra, 4375280
- Early Bird discounts at Shankar-Li Hotel & Resort. 4412999

**KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY**

The unbelievable has occurred—over the last week, Putali Sadak actually maintained average PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) levels of less than 100, well below the national standards of 120mg/m3. The rest of the Valley did just as well, with pollution levels dropping in every one of the six monitoring stations. As usual, Matsyagun proved the healthiest with a crystal clear PM10 concentration of 12.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

**NEPALI WEATHER**

There is a trough over western Nepal that originated from the Arabian Sea that’s nearly spare its moisture, and another low pressure area over Bangladesh is heading our way from the Bay as this satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon clearly shows. The monsoon is therefore yet not over and another wave will have another bout of rains into the weekend. August has been drier than average, with only 110mm (rainfall) or far less than the average 350mm. Dho to contract western Nepal. Expect bright sunny mornings, afternoon hazy weather, and brief showers.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

**Dhamro reinvents the classic cops and robbers tale and brings it to the 21st century. Kabir (John Abraham) and his gang are a group of slick, mean, fast riding bikers who commit daring robberies and then transform into inexpensive pizza delivery boys. Jai Dixit (Abhishek Bachchan) plays the honest cop who is brought into catch these speed demons. He ropes in Ali (Uday Chopra) a hippy-go-lucky mechanic and prodigious bike rider to help him. And so the chase begins…**

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**HOUSE ON RENT:** At Panipokhari, opposite the American embassy, behind the petrol pump station. 1 master bedroom w/ attached bath. 3 bedrooms w/ semi attached bath, drawing room, kitchen, living room, bedroom, store room, pujari room, watchman room, an outhouse and garage. Total area of compound 700 sq. ft. For details contact mobile no. 9851024174

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**For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5343523-36.**
DEUBA DOES THE DEUDA: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba taking part in the Deuda Dance Festival at BCG on Monday.

PEACEFUL DISCUSSIONS: A discussion organised on Wednesday by Civil Solidarity for Peace focused on immediate peace talks at Chamber Bhaswati in Jamal and included (from left) Mathura Prasad Shrestha, Madhab Nepal and Arjun Narsingh KC.

TALKING TOURISM: Mirza Mohammed Taqiab, director of Tourism Malaysia (second from right) takes the mic at a press briefing on the company’s new tourism package deal with Marcopolo Travels, on Friday at the Hyatt Regency.

UNHOLY MESS: Garbage piled up in front of the entrance to Naag Pokharki directly across from the Narayan Hiti palace, on Sunday, the final day of the three-day Naag Pokharki festival.

FEAR does Kathmandu get to see an art exhibition of such range and variety as the ‘Contemporary Expressions of India’ displayed at the Siddhartha Art Gallery to mark India’s Independence Day last week. Art aficionados would have had to travel the length and breadth of that vast nation to see all the work on display, yet here you have them all under one roof.

The exhibition showcases 20 artists from various parts of India, from three generations and using different modes, genres and expressions. “It is a diverse and unique work that reflects the spirit of a multicultural nation celebrating 58 years of its political and cultural independence,” explains the gallery’s Sangita Thapa, who brought the paintings to Nepal. The artists on display are Pramod Kumar, Buwa Shete, Chintan Upadhyay, Sheila Mahminjani, Chandra Bhattacherjee, Anand Panchal, Mansir Chadha, Santosh More, Hema Upadhyay, Sanjeev Simpmpare, Surajkant Lokhande, Vinita Gupta, Satish Wavare, Sobha Ghare, Jitendra Singh Baoni, Datta Bansode, Anand Mali, Beena Pradhan, Sudarshan Shetty and Rajendra Khaspe. All are accomplished painters and have won various awards.

“I want to define the distance between this two visuals, the seen and the unseen. The visible, which is in front of our eyes and the invisible which is on the other side of our eyes,” says Vanita Gupta, summing up her own work as well as those of her fellow artists from India. The common thread running through the works is the deep feelings the artists express about their country.

The materials they have chosen to express themselves in is varied and unique, ranging from Santosh More’s symbolic scrolls, concentric circles and dots to Hema Upadhyay’s use of photo cut-outs of herself as the visible protagonist in her work. This is a display of a wide range of artists who are individualistic in their expressions and it is a treat to view such a spectrum of artistic talent at one go.

As Vibhuraj Kapoor from Mumbai’s Gallery Beyond says: “This is the beginning of a dialogue, the furthering of cultural exchange.”

Contemporary Expressions of India is on at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Bater Mahal Revisited till 30 August.

Tapas & Margaritas

This is a time not meant for sissies, but to cherish a special moment and say hello to the great Tapas & Margaritas.

“Tapas” is a Spanish word which means (lit) a concept which originated many years ago. When entrepeneur finished work for the day they would go to the “Tapas” to enjoy a well earned drink which was usually covered by a piece of bread. This tradition often involved corn roasts, sausage eaten as snacks to accompany the drinks.

Margarita is a cocktail whose main liquor base is tequila. It is a sour drink which is a mixture of Tequila and Lime.

Date: 3rd, 4th & 5th September
Venue: The Piano Bar & Poolside
Time: 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Price: 500/ Nett
Includes a cool splash in the pool along with a pint of Carlsberg.

For further information, please contact Guest Relations at 4248999 ext 2865.
Alive from Kathmandu

We’d like to welcome our viewers back to this specially exaggerated edition of EmpTV’s 25-hour-a-day Brokksnek News. Let’s now go live to Kathmandu where our parachute correspondent, the one-and-only Khubsurat Dutta, is standing by in the relative safety of the newly-opened J Bar in Thamel, with the very latest.

“Kasto bekul raichha. Hindi taa po bhopa, isina bhunya, wrong number kya.”

Sorry about that, we will try to track down Khubsurat dead or alive in the Nepali capital in the course of the day. The last we heard, she had a late night at the casino and has gone sightseeing to Bhaktapur with her dad, Pappa, mom, Amini, hubby, Aniruddha, and sister, Mumtaz, who have all taken the perilous journey to the besieged Nepali capital. Brave people.

As Khubsurat told us yesterday: “When will I get a chance to see Kathmandu with my whole family?” And that sums up the selfless professionalism and remarkable nonchalance of this intrepid correspondent who has walked into the jaws of death with such unconcern for the safety of herself and her near and dear ones.

As I said, we will be trying to track Khubsurat down later in this news bulletin, that is unless she has switched off her mobile and is swimming at the Hack & Yeti, or shopping at Dalbhat Bhateni.

And now, to give you a idea of just how bad things are in Kathmandu let me read you some news reports from this morning’s Nepalese newspapers:

Nepal Goes To India

KATHMANDU—1ML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal has joined counterparts from other parties to pay a visit to New Delhi. Speaking to reporters before departure, Nepal said the trip was to take a stock on things and stock up on provisions. “You never know how long the blockade is going to last, so it is best to be prepared,” he told scribes at the Tribhuvan International Airport.

India Comes To Nepal

NEW DELHI—India has warned in no uncertain terms that if the situation in Kathmandu continues to deteriorate it may have to send reinforcements by paratropping more correspondents into the Nepalese capital.

“We won’t take no for an answer,”

National Security Adviser J N Dixit told a close-door meeting, and promptly leaked his remarks to the press as soon as it was over.

“The people in Nepal need help, and it is our duty to undertake a fullscale media bombardment so they can carry on with their normal lives.”

Girija Not In India

CHANDRANAGAR—NCSupremo Girija Koirala isn’t in India, according to sources close to him. This has lead to wild speculation that the octogenarian leader is in the pink of health.

Addressing a press meet in this dacoit-infested town, Koirala said yesterday regression would not be truly over until the king nominated him prime minister. “I will go down fighting, and I’ll take the country down with me,” he said amidst applause from delighted dacoits and other VIPs in the audience.

Also speaking on the occasion, a leading human rights activist denied there were informal talks going on with the Maoists. “How can there be secret talks when I haven’t been asked to facilitate them?” he asked no one in particular.

Army Announces Top Secret Offensive

NEPAL—The Western Division Headquarters today announced a top secret invasion of Maoist strongholds in Binayak in Arghakhanchi, beginning 0700 hours on Friday morning.

“This is a surprise attack, and we hope to catch the rebels completely unaware,” the army spokesman told a packed press conference here.

As you can see, ladies and gentlemen, things in Nepal are in a state of flux. I’m told we are trying once more to contact our Star Reporter, Khubsurat in Kathmandu. Khubsurat, can you hear me? Hello...hello “Sorry, network busy. Please try again next year.”