“We couldn’t take it anymore”

Dailekh’s defiant mothers rise up against the Maoists

For the first time since the insurgency started in these mountains of mid-western Nepal nine years ago, a women-led anti-Maoist uprising has spread across Dailekh in the past week.

“Down with Maoism,” the demonstrators shouted at a big rally in Dallu on Monday. “Down with Prachanda.” Most demonstrators were surprised at their own audacity, wondering where they got the courage to be so defiant!

The protests were started by women, the men joined in and some came from as far as a day’s walk away. They were protesting rebel demands for money and food. Krishna Shahi, 42, says she and others in her village had complied fearing they would be killed: “When they said every family had to give one son, that is when I lost all my fear. We told them, kill us but you can’t take our sons. We had nothing left to give them, we couldn’t take it any longer.”

Indeed, the rebel threat to take away young sons and daughters appears to have been the main reason the women spearheaded protests in Dallu, Salleri and other towns in northeastern Dailekh.

The villages have mostly women, young children and the elderly because the men have all fled. And despite the traditionally low social status of women here, something seems to have snapped.

The uprising was triggered by the killing of Raja Rajecharaya earlier this month by the security forces. He had been forced by the Maoists to head Dallu’s ‘people’s government’. When the rebels came to drape his body in a Maoist flag, Raja’s relatives beat them up and chased them away.

Anger was already seething when the rebels prevented locals from observing Tihar and forced young boys and girls to become WTs (‘whole timers’). Villagers thrashed Maoists in several villages and protests began. There was swift retribution. In Salleri, the Maoists killed three people, including a eight-year-old boy, who were organising a resistance meeting on 20 November. Twenty-two others were abducted and villagers say six of them have been already killed. Nearly 1,200 people have fled Salleri and arrived in Dailekh.

Nina Bahadur Baniat from Salleri says local women and citizens has started to organise protests since Tihar. Women from 13 VDCs in the area have been organising small village gatherings in open defiance of the Maoists since 9 November. But 19-year-old Babita BK of Nauli, who delivered a baby a week ago after escaping to Dallu, says villagers are now afraid they may have stirred a hornet’s nest. “We are really afraid what they will do to our village now,” she says.

In Kathmandu on Thursday, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said Dailekh’s would be protected and announced a Rs 30 million aid package. He also gave the Maoists a deadline of 13 January 2005 to come for talks otherwise he would announce elections.

See also p3-4
A Jay Edwards is heir to Darjeeling’s famous Glenary’s bakery and restaurant. The business whizkid tripled its annual turnover to Rs 7.5 million. He expanded it into a restaurant chain across northeastern India. Today, Glenary’s is synonymous with Darjeeling. Barely 30, a millionaire and father of five, Ajay realised that if he continued this way he would die a rich man but wouldn’t have done anything for his community.

So, Ajay took a sabbatical from work and started making up for lost time to save Darjeeling. First thing was to organise the annual Darjeeling Carnival to promote tourism and improve the livelihoods of people here.

A Himalayan Region Youth Forum for young people from conflict-ridden areas of the Indian northeast, Kashmir and even Nepal is in the works. He wants them to be able to come together, share their experiences and help each other overcome the trauma of conflict and growing up amidst violence. Ajay himself had a troubled youth and did not study beyond class eight.

The people of Darjeeling still have to travel down to Siliguri for medical treatment and are cheated by hospitals there. Ajay decided to establish a diagnostic centre in Darjeeling itself. This project will cost Rs 1.5 million and Ajay has come up with an ingenious method to raise funds: he plans to ask each Darjeeling resident to donate a minimum of Rs 100, which will be transformed into a coupon that can be used at the centre once it is established. The hospital gets built, and Darjeeling’says benefit. It is easy to see why this man struck it rich. He is a socially and politically concerned citizen and as he puts it “This is no coincidence, it is providence”.

(Aarti Basnyat)

PARACHUTISTS: The Royal Nepali Army took more than 60 journalists to the site of the Pandora battle in western Nepal by plane and choppers from Kathmandu on Wednesday.

STONED: An unseasonable storm dumped hailstones on this car park at Hyatt Regency, while the rest of central Nepal got heavy showers.

MAKING THEM LAUGH: Comedian Haribungsa Acharya belts it out at a program to mark International Child Rights Day and the 14th anniversary of CWIN on 20 November.

SIZZLERS: A band performs at the launch of Sizzling Weekends on 19 November at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

SAY CHEESE: The winners of the Kathmandu Mountain Bike’s women’s race pose for a photograph at the finish line on 20 November.
Veer-Zaara portrays the trauma of partition. In true Yashraj tradition, it is an emotional love story. Saamiya Siddiqui (Rani Mukherji) is a Pakistani lawyer who helps two lovers. Veer aka Veer Pratap Singh (Shahrukh Khan) is from India and Zara aka Zaara Hayat Khan (Preity Zinta) is from Pakistan. This film shows how love conquers all and goes beyond boundaries drawn by men. It also reflects the new Indian sentiment towards Pakistan.
Golf is in

The town is bursting with golfing events

Golfers rejoice. We are in the midst of the peak golfing season. In November and December, there is so much happening it’s hard to keep track.

The big one is the Surya Nepal Masters, sponsored for over a decade by Nepal’s largest corporate house, Surya Nepal Pvt Ltd. Scheduled over five days from 8-12 December, the venue is once again the stunning Gleneagles designed Gokarna Golf Course.

A major attraction will be the arrival of the region’s leading golfers, giving local talent the rare opportunity of competing with top players. Being a point-scoring event on the Armby Valley Air Safari Indian Golf Tour, most players on the Indian Professional Golf tour circuit will be participating.

“This year, Nepal Tourism Board has joined as partner to promote golf in Nepal,” says Sam Roy of Surya Nepal. “[We are looking at] promoting standards and helping golf grow. The plan is to target the over-100,000 existing golf population in Southasia. Our promotion outside Nepal will be through tournament hoardings at 40 of the largest golf clubs in the region. The tournament will be telecast on Ten Sports channel in three half-hour viewings.”

Standard Chartered Bank has also joined hands this year by sponsoring the Pro-Am event. The Bank is on both serious and fun-loving amateur golfers. Participants will have the opportunity to play in a group with professionals, receiving valuable tips and seeing firsthand some so-called ‘impossible shots’ being executed.

The Surya Nepal Masters is not just the biggest golfing event in Nepal, it is also probably the biggest sporting event in terms of prize money. The total purse this year is a whopping Rs 1.6 million. It will be up for grabs to some 80-odd professionals from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and a few tour regulars from Malaysia.

At this is exciting news with Surya Nepal realising our dreams of using the development of golf to the advantage of the tourism industry. They are building on the foundation of the expensive golf infrastructure and opening up new dimensions for growth in golf tourism.

So what else is happening?

Scheduled this weekend is the prestigious ‘amateur only’ golfing event, the Nepal Amateur Open 2004 at the Royal Nepal Golf Club. This three-day 54-hole event concludes on Sunday with an interclub friendship match.

Next week sees a four-day 72-hole preparatory tournament for both professionals and top amateurs – providing the perfect occasion to tune up for serious tournament play before the Surya Nepal Masters. Last week’s Surya Nepal Western Open at the Himalayan Golf Course in Pokhara saw professionals Deepak Neupane stand first (+7), Deepak Magar second (+12), and Ramesh Nagarkoti third (+13). Not great scores but the course was set up beautifully.

Golf is happening everywhere, isn’t it? If you got on the course?

Golfer Deepak Acharya

The clash of ivories

All you need is a long mallet, a ball, two teams and a herd of elephants

Twenty-two years ago, a wacky Scotsman figured out a way to play polo in slow motion by replacing horses with elephants. What he didn’t realise is that elephants can gallop too!

So, a languid pachyderm version of polo actually turned out to be wilder than the equestrian edition. Accounts of whether elephant polo is more exciting may vary on whether you consider the size of the taskers an advantage or disadvantage but there is no doubt that elephant polo has taken off in Nepal. And this mainly because of the annual Tiger tops Elephant Polo tournament, which this year takes place from 28 November to 4 December in Meghauil. If you haven’t already booked your hotel rooms, you should.

Unbelievably, elephant polo has been held once annually in the last 22 years, except in the third year when there was confusion about the dates and it was held twice. So much the better.

This year, seven teams are participating. After the first day of festivities, the real fun begins on the second day with the league match, which consists of four chukkers of 35 minutes each. The quarter and semi-final matches will be held on the third and fourth day with the grand finale scheduled for 4 December.

There is no historical evidence suggesting the origin of elephant polo but there seems to have been one eccentrically inclined Maharaja of Jaipur who staged a similar tournament some 50 years ago, just as a joke. There are miniature Mughal era paintings of women that could be described as playing modern day elephant polo.

Contact: 4361500, info@tigermountain.com

How to play

Excerpts from the World Elephant Polo Association (WEPA) Rules:

● The game will be played by four players on each team on a marked pitch of 120 m by 70 m using a standard size polo ball.

● The game will consist of two 10-minute chukkers of playing time, with an interval of 15 minutes. The whistle blown by the referee stops and starts the play.

● The pitch will be marked with a centre line. A circle with a radius of 10 m in the centre of the field and a semi-circle in front of the goals, with a radius of 20 m, measured from the centre of the goal line at either end of the pitch, will form the D.

● Elephants and ends are changed at half time.

● The complete ball must travel over the sideline or backline, to be out, and completely across the goal line to be a goal.

● Men must play with the right hand only and ladies may play with both hands if desired. However, if ladies play with one hand then it must be with the right only.

● There shall be no restrictions as to the height, weight or sex of the elephants.

● An elephant may not pick up the ball with its trunk during play. To do so shall constitute a foul.

● Sugar cane or rice balls packed with vitamins (molasses and rock salt) shall be given to the elephants at the end of the match: and a cold beer, or soft drinks, to the elephant drivers, but not vice versa.

● Intentionally hitting another player, elephant, or Umpire with a stick is a personal foul. A free hit shall be awarded to the opposing side, with only one elephant defending 15 metres from the goal.

● Elephant drivers and players must wear a hat in form of the traditional polar tope or a pole helmet. Should a player’s hat fall off outside the D, the game is stopped while it is recovered.
Bikash Pandey was with the Alliance for Energy group that opposed the Arun III project 10 years ago. He is now an energy specialist and Nepali representative of Winrock International. He talked to us about lessons learnt from the Arun debacle.

Nepal Times: It’s been 10 years since the Arun III project was dumped. Any regrets?
Bikash Pandey: If you were a resident of the Arun Valley, it was bad news because the road didn’t get built. In terms of the power sector, if Arun was built it would have meant a huge jump in power tariffs, even more than we are paying today. In the best case scenario the project would have been completed this year, with the insurgency it may even have been delayed by a few more years. The risks with Arun were enormous, the road was already a mega-project which was to have been built in 14 months back-to-back with the biggest project in Nepal, and this multiplied the risks. The massiveness of Arun meant that nothing else would have come online, and we’d have had much more serious blackouts. It was because the smaller alternatives started coming onstream already in 2000 that we haven’t had power shortages.

Were the alternatives really better?
A mix. Kali Gandaki was from the public sector and was fairly big but it was built under the same modalities as Arun. There were the private sector Bhote Kosi and Khimti, and there has been a cost in dealing with the international private sector, but we have learnt from that. You’ve got Chitrak and Indrawat, completely Nepali private sector. The Eighth and Ninth Plans were very much dominated by the so-called least-cost generation expansion planning where one big project crowded out other smaller ones. But the Tenth Plan has all of sudden made plurality a policy: 60 percent to be built by the private sector, more than a third small hydro category. There has been a paradigm shift, but learnt the hard way.

In hindsight, would you have done it differently?
The reason we had a strong campaign 10 years ago was because it wasn’t just an anti-Arun thing. We were not just purists and saying small is beautiful. We said there are better alternatives, one need not do this now. In fact, our concern was that the systemic weakness in the way government and World Bank operated was turning what was one of Nepal’s best hydroelectric sites from an asset to a liability by making it too expensive. We said let’s build Arun 10 years from now. It wasn’t that Arun was expensive it was the process through which Arun was going to be built. So, you had a situation where public funded large projects were coming out to be three times more expensive than locally financed small projects, putting economies of scale completely on its head.

What are the lessons in dealing with the local population?
We never could get this message across to the people of Sankhuwasabha. They wanted the road, the country was going to get power and they didn’t really understand why the activists had any problems with it. They said these guys are taking away development from us. One can understand there is disappointment at the local level, but is it worthwhile for the country on the whole? We had the challenging task of telling them there are much better and cheaper ways to build the road than attach it to a $1billion project.

If the argument was economic, it must still be the case. Our concern at that time was that Nepal’s whole hydropower sector had been hijacked by this single-project mentality. You build one project and then you wait ten years to get the next one, there could be no other players during that period. This would take costs beyond the $5000 per kilowatt range, hydropower would stop being a resource for this country because it would be too simply expensive to build. The only way to get out of this trap would to be have plurality, you have competition, you bring in the private sector where appropriate, the public sector should continue. You can take a very attractive project and increase the cost to a point where it is barely feasible. You could have got very high returns from Arun if you had built it at a reasonable cost. So, you build big when the time comes to build big. In the meantime, you build capacity to handle bigger projects.

It seems we learnt our lessons, but did the World Bank?
This is a development philosophy question. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank can be extremely useful if you are dealing with a competent government. That is the model to which they work. India and China run circles around the World Bank, they use it as a supplementary investment. They do more than 90 percent themselves, and rely on World Bank for only 10 percent. Whereas we are completely dependent, and the World Bank has its own procurement rules, due diligence processes which are cumbersome. It doesn’t make sense for them to do small ten megawatt projects. On the other hand, a host country like Nepal tends to be over-ambitious because there is a large donor. If we approached a private lender we may go for a 15 megawatt project, but if it is the World Bank it will move up to 500 megawatts. Then the World Bank bureaucracy kicks in: they say the host government wants it, but the host government is not competent, so they add all kinds of conditionalities and consultants. The system moves you towards large projects and consultants and conditions. So they tell you to raise tariffs, and it is a disaster for building local capacity. It becomes a case of the tail wagging the dog.

What was the one big positive outcome of the cancellation of Arun III?
We predicted it, and it happened: there is a lot of private Nepali money and hydropower has now become an investment opportunity instead of an infrastructure thing to be built by the public sector. It is a different thinking. The international private sector opened the doors for the local investors who saw the rates they were getting and were attracted. Bhote Kosi and Khimti did that for us.
Displaced mothers and daughters receiving survival skills training at a government office in Simkot (left), soldiers guarding a Nepalganj flight about to take off last week.

member from that household has to join the rebels. In Jain VDC, a three-day walk from here, about 80 young men and women were recruited in October to be ‘whole time’ cadres and taken to training camps. Some returned to spread ‘revolutionary education’, while 16- to 20-year-olds were taken away for military training.

“They say the revolution has reached its final phase and are confident they can take over Simikot whenever they want,” adds a political activist who recently visited his home village. There he met Comrade Ballar, the Maoist secretary of Humla, and local commanders.

In villages like Baghaugam, the Maoists announced the names of 100 young men and women on 24 October and asked families to keep their sons and daughters ready when they returned on 16 November to pick them up.

Parents watched quietly as the Maoists took away 116 children.

“We performed a funeral ceremony as if we would never see our children again,” recounts 55-year-old Sima Lama from Limatang who let the Maoists take her two young sons. “I have been praying and crying every day. Only God can save our children,”

Parents comply out of fear. Last month, the rebels set an example by killing the mother of a girl who ran away to Simikot. None of the parents want help from the security forces fearing they will be interrogated and detained for allowing their children to join the Maoists.

Rani Shail, 17, also escaped from the Maoist recruitment camp in Khampy four months ago and fled to Simikot. “The army won’t be able to find them even if it tries,” she told us, “By the time they reach our village, the Maoists will have left.”

Twelve-year-old Senphup Lama from Tuche was also listed for recruitment. On the day she was taken, he cried so much Senphup’s 14-year-old sister offered herself in his place, and the rebels let

Senphup go. “I was scared that is why I cried,” says Senphup who feels guilty and anxious about his sister.

Since the Maoist recruitment intensified, most Lama parents here have started sending off their daughters instead of their sons to become Maoists. As in the rest of patriarchal Nepal, sons are regarded as more precious. A local activist explains: “The daughters are angry at their parents and some of them have vowed never to return. The Lama community pamper its boys.” He estimates up to 60 percent of the Maoist recruits in Humla are girls.

As the 16 November deadline approached, more than 3,000 mothers and 300 teachers from outlying villages came to Simikot to pressure the local officials to start peace talks. “We thought we had come to beg for food and insulated us, actually we came to beg for peace,” recalls 35-year-old Hima Parvay from Baraung. Hima has brought her son, Sundar, whose name is on the Maoist list. “I’m not going back,” Sundar tells us defiantly.

As the number of displaced people grows, food is running out in Simikot. The district administration distributes five kgs of rice per family three times a week, and officials are worried the food will run out. The UN’s World Food Programme has stopped its Food For Work program due to the Maoist blockade in Simikot.

There is a new Maoist commander in Humla who has stopped recruitment for now, and one human rights activist here explains: “The commanders may have realised their new regime will be worthless without the people’s support.”

But the villagers are skeptical. The Maoists recently lifted their blockade of Simikot so villagers could attend a health camp organised by the Nepalese Trust, but warned them to return to their villages otherwise they could be killed when Simikot is attacked soon.

(All names have been changed to protect identity) (See also: ‘Cold war’ #126)

Monks not Maoists

As Maoists intensify their campaign to broadly recruit one member from each family many Lama families from Humla are sending children away to DharmaSthal to become nuns and monks. In the first week of November, just before the deadline for Maoist recruitment, 28 children went to India from Badaga and Topra.

“I don’t want to lose my 13-year-old daughter to the Maoists,” says 40-year-old Siba Lama. “She would have a better life as a nun.” The tradition of sending children to monasteries had been dying out in Humla but was revived again because of the Maoist threat. Forty-year-old Chandra Lama sent his 12-year-old daughter to India too and says she insisted on it. “She said she’d rather be a nun than a Maoist,” he says. But some, like Har Lama, are worried about what the Maoists will do if they find out he has sent his son away to a monastery.

Mountain film festival

The third Kathmandu international Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) will screen 50 films on mountains and the lifestyle of mountain people from 9-12 December. KIMFF will bring together the best mountain films produced over the last three years worldwide at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamal Pokhari. The range from 21 countries include anthropological films, alpine documentation, adventure cinema and more. The festival will open with ‘On the Road with the Red God’ Machindranath by Indian filmmaker Keanga Teten. A ‘Learn to shoot like a Pro’ workshop will be held on 10 December. Day three of the festival, which coincides with the International Mountain Day, will have a photo exhibition on-sky sports and mountain culture for children and ‘Know Your Hima’ quiz. On the last day, Dr Tinita Bahadur Shrestha will present a slide show lecture on Nepal’s biodiversity.

Grooming assistance

The main message from the official visit to Nepal by the Asian Development Bank’s Vice President Liquin Jin was that the Manila-based institution was ‘not abandoning Nepal’. Half of the assistance from the ADB would be grants from 2005, with the bigger chunk of it conditional on significant progress on governance and reform. ‘In a word, “We know we are running out of time in terms of assessing progress but we will complete it soon and decide on the grant component. We stand with Nepal until a critical hour and remain committed to enhancing our assistance should peace be restored.” ADB was concerned about the conflict and its adverse impact on Nepal’s development and he added: “This has become the most serious impediment to sustained economic growth and poverty reduction. ADB hopes that the government will continue its efforts towards achieving lasting peace.”

Everest wins Banff award

The Daughters of Everest, directed and produced by Sapana Sikay and Ranjana Limbu won the Alpine Club of Canada award for Best Film on Climbing at the Banff Mountain Film Festival in Banff, Alberta, Canada. The film tells the story of the first-ever expedition of Sherpa women to climb Everest. “A delightful and very honest film that captures the camaraderie of a group of women who take pride in their mountains,” says jury member Florian Cameran. A film made 35 years ago in a Polish film school called Oderwi (Recreation) took the Grand Prize at this year’s Banff Mountain Film Festival.

In transit

The Nepali government has begun feasibility studies on a transit route that India wants through Nepal to Tibet. In response to Indian requests, several routes are being considered. “One of the most feasible so far is the Kerung-Paljoma border near Tibet which the Nepalese are also interested in,” says Commerce Secretary Dinesh Chandra Pyakurel. “But we have also been studying the Jogbani-Kishankhand road.” The Arki Highway already links Tibet’s Khawa with Kathmandu but officials say it is too narrow and would not allow the volume of traffic the Indian government wants. “That is why we need to think about building a new highway,” says Pyakurel. (See also p 10).

India has said it is keen to have a Nepal transit route to Tibet in order to boost its trade with China. Indo-China bilateral trade between January and September this year stood at $8.79 billion, up by 85 percent over the corresponding period last year. Since Nepal too has trade interest with Tibet, government officials say they are working on modalities that do not hamper the Nepal-China trade while allowing India the transit route. “We will make sure that our prime export products do not use the transit route,” Government officials say Nepal would benefit from its inland container depots by allowing transit for Indian and Chinese goods. The Nepal-India transit treaty allows the two countries reciprocity in transit. An official said once transit to Tibet is allowed to India, Nepal may sign similar facilities to Pakistan via India.

भारतको प्रति सहयोग चाहियाँ हाम्रो संस्तुपको रामनीयाँहो

माष्टर्स भन्दा कलाकारहरूहरू आफ्नै रूपमा लाग्न लाग्न निर्देशन पद्धतिलाई पुनः मान्यता दिन्नुहुने र निर्देशनको आलेखक भवानी प्रसाद राम्रोली नामक प्रतिक धारा घोषणा दिल्ली नेपालको संस्कृतिज्ञाति र साहित्यको संस्कृतिज्ञाति भवानी प्रसाद राम्रोली नामक प्रतिक धारा घोषणा दिल्ली नेपालको संस्कृतिज्ञाति र साहित्यको संस्कृतिज्ञाति
In the heat of conflict, the dirty war being waged by the regime in letters has receded into the background. But the fracas at the Royal Nepal Academy is nearly as detrimental to the development of the democratic spirit as the battles raging in the west. An ‘RNA’ is involved in both: the Royal Nepal Academy in one and in the other the Royal Nepal Army.

Saying they were put off by politics to select academicians from hundreds of applicants, the left-out litterati have petitioned the king for the restoration of the ancient regime at the Royal Nepal Academy. One group was made up of professors and doctors who are behaving as if they hold a monopoly right over intellectualism. The other group consists of literatures specialising in penning panegyrics. Yet another has a poet famous for creating an epic in praise of Hillary Clinton.

The stated purpose of these self-declared scholars is that the king take over the chancellorship of the Royal Nepal Academy. With a constructive king at the helm, their exhortations may just work. The belief that the fiercest battles in academia are fought when the stakes are smallest may after all be correct.

There isn’t much to gain by becoming an academician these days except the privilege of being called one. The RNA pressures are better known for holding shareholders’ meetings of private sector banks and its driveway is the venue for various Kathmandu based artists before their departure to Arya Ghat for cremation.

In the name of opposing the politicisation of the arts and literature, all that these schyophants want is a return of the certitude of Panchayat politics when everyone knew their place and stayed there. Their notion of artistic purity is that competitive politics is a blemish on the soul. Only the Great Father, the eulogy incarnation of the supreme being himself, is fit enough to rule over academia. After all, the prime minister is untouchable because he is furnished by democracy. With scholars like these, no wonder our national psyche is dominated by the wait for the second coming.

In an op-ed piece in Kantipur this week, writer Ramesh Bikal has admitted that, like many others of his ilk, he had held Brother One in high esteem. Even when the insurgents were drenching the hills and plains with the blood of fellow Nepalis, many public figures from the left and right valorised the Maoists as brave patriots engaged in fighting their beloved fatherland from the scourge of democracy. Bikal has shown the courage to publicly admit his blunder, but several others have quietly become ardent apologists of the post-October Four order. This is not surprising because monarchists and Maoists are wont to worship mirror image canvas.

Monarchists hold that a hereditary king has heaven’s mandate to rule, while the Maoists kneel at the feet of the awesome possessor of the Ultimate Truth. Both believe in Aristotle: “It is natural that some beings command and others obey, that each may obtain mutual safety.” No wonder, scholars critical of the excesses during the democratic period before the royal takeover went silent all of a sudden. To their understanding, even if a patriarch gives himself a hefty raise or acquires another fleet of limousines, he must have done so for the collective good.

To our misfortune, the lack of intellectual leadership is even starker than the shortgage of principled politicians. Where are the social scientists who can separate the wheat from the chaff, demystify events, and clarify issues? There is no shortage of those who readily proclaim that violence is abhorrent, that both sides to the conflict are guilty, but very few show the scornful courage of Khagendra Sangraula to hold a mirror to the Maoists and monarchists alike, not to mention parties practicing nonviolent politics.

Kanchan Pudalvini and Ramesh Bikal are opposite faces of the same coin of moral certitude—the two validate each other. They share the horror of human fallibility inherent in any democratic system. Unfortunately, none of the ‘Profi-Doc’ signing petitions have it in them to even question, let alone stop, the parallel march of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in the kingdom.
DIVIDED THEY STAND
Re: ‘Divided they stand’ (#222).

It needs courage to transform polarity into plurality, as Dipa Shah argues in her Guest Column (‘Polarity vs plurality’ #222). But thetroniers vanilly justifying the existing elite powerbase by trying to castigate both left and right-wingers in Nepali politics as useless which then goes underestimates political freedom for people like Deuba to rule under the monarchial directive. The truth is, it is high time the king himself took some valiant steps to redress equilibrium in Nepali society which can only happen if an active and dynamic premier is chosen to lead the country, and he himself pares correct political advice like his late father King Mahendra did. This way, Surya Bahadur Thapa has lent some credence to the need for a new political force in Nepal that can capture the essence of polarity and plurality. Democracy in Nepal is actually being trampled upon by the Nepali elite, not the masses, lest one forget, so forget about blaming the foreign hand or trying to define the ‘absolute middles’ which are non-existent. The Maoist problem can solve itself automatically if the king takes the right steps now, thus giving him mass popularity like King Juan Carlos or King Norodom Shihanouk.

Praveen Sahai, email

JAYABA BANBAJYI, email

The piece on how Darjeeling matches with Nepal and clings to their original language and culture makes one think about the two-facedness of the establishment in Nepal. The government, RNA, diplomats, and human rights organisations claim that any war can be won only by public opinion and not by arms. Maoists are branded terrorists and they are, but the security forces need to function better also so the people trust them. The security forces’ involvement in corruption, atrocities, and harassing women is pushing more people unwillingly to the Maoist fold. At this rate, even if the Maoists are annihilated, it will have lost the people’s support. We are in the middle of nowhere, and people are死了 and killed by both sides. ‘Divided they stand’, remains incomplete, who is divided: the government, Maoists or the Nepali people?

Gyan Subba, email

It is easy to blame minister Raghu Pant for trying to implement the labour lottery scheme as Ashutosh Tiwari has. Though the RNA is on a better footing, building its arm forces, though the government’s perspective. But one needs to view this through the eyes of the common Nepali people. Though the RNA is on a better footing, building its arm forces, though the government’s perspective. But one needs to view this through the eyes of the common Nepali people.

Vivek Shrestha, email

I miss Darjeeling! Every March, my parents and I hit the road from Kathmandu to take me to boarding school in Darjeeling. Reading the article (‘Darjeeling’), #222; brought back memories from those trips: eating at little restaurants along the narrow highway, the swirling mist rising up the hills, slopes of orange green with tea bushes. It has been a long way for me from Darjeeling to Iowa but I miss the little town where I left behind many friends and, yes, feet.

Jaya Moktan, Darjeeling

KUDOS TO KASULA
It was wonderful to read about Bal Krishna Kasula’s extraordi- nary feat (‘A Bhaktapur brick-layer’, #222). His efforts in earthquake resistant construction technology has proves he is a real asset to the country. However, it seems that his expertise is getting promoted outside the country more than within. There are many like him. Their skills should be used by Nepalis people first. NSET and the government should also provide people like Kasula support so they are able to further improve their skills.

Sunil Shrestha, Coventry, UK

TYRANTS
In his enthusiasm to boost Nepal’s tourism by providing retirement homes to foreign tyrants, Kunda Dist in Under My Hat (‘Old age home for the world’s tyrants’, #222) says Emperor Bokassa invested his hard-earned money from the Chadian exchequer in France. As any despot worth his salt knows, Bokassa hailed from France. As any despot worth his salt knows, Bokassa hailed from France. As any despot worth his salt knows, Bokassa hailed from France. Bokassa is in the Central African Republic (yes, that is a country). And, as long as I have the editor’s ear, let me ask this: can we give refuge to other people’s dictators, but who will give refuge to ours?

Ganesh Rai, email
Red alert in Simikot

“The parents performed a funeral ceremony, as if they would never see their children again.”

-Huma mother whose two sons were marched away by Maoists last month

NARESH NEWAR in SIMIKOT

The freezing winds have brought down the temperature to minus three and for people in this besieged headquarters of Humla district this is good news. This means it may be too cold for the Maoists to launch their threatened attack on the town. “Let’s pray there will be more snow soon, that is our only defence,” says a senior civil servant posted to this district on Nepal’s remote northwestern tip. The official is shivering inside his freezing office: there is no money for kerosene and firewood is scarce. Electricity is solar-powered and the batteries last only two hours.

The Maoists have threatened to attack Simikot, and even though past warnings did not materialise, the locals seem to take it seriously. “We shouldn’t take it lightly,” says the official, who has received intimidating phone calls from the local Maoist commander. Last month, the Maoists staged simultaneous attacks on Gangdai in Mugu and Jumla Bajar. Locals who have fled their villages for fear of forced recruitment say thousands of people have been seen being led by about 200 Maoists near the Bajura border to the south.

The official says the Maoists are not bluffing and has relayed the message to the capital but Kathmandu isn’t listening. The security force here is only 200-strong and is vulnerable to Maoist human wave attacks. “They can easily take over Simikot,” explains a local politician pointing out the strategic passes on a map from where police have withdrawn. Government presence is seen only in seven wards of Simikot, state power is non-existent elsewhere.

The Maoists are on a recruitment spree and in the past three months launched a campaign with the slogan: ‘Wear your shoes, take up arms and prepare for war.’ The rebels leave a shoe overnight outside the house as a sign that one

Forget the fundos
Is god staging a comeback?

Religion, we’re told, is rising again. America’s Christian fundamentalist right is said to have put George W Bush back in office. The Muslim equivalent, the Islamist movement up to and perhaps just shy of al Qaeda, is seething on Arab streets, Pakistani madrassas and Philippine jungles. Sri Lankan Buddhist fanatics are heard from each time they perceive an insult to the founder of their faith and Hindu nationalism remains powerful in India (and Nepal) despite the BJP defeat at the polls earlier this year.

So, is god making a comeback, as the authors of most of these movements and fearful secularists would have it? Well, I’d say the evidence was mixed but the answers is definitely trending ‘no’ or at least ‘probably not’. For one thing, I’d say the Christian influence in America is overrated by a largely secular-minded media that finds the right wing, Jesus-loving Churchgoer somewhat of an alien being. In fact, the religious component of the American electorate is as diverse and divided as ever with many Catholics, mainstream Protestants and even some Evangelicals voting for hapless Senator Kerry in the election.

The Christian fundos make a lot of noise and wield a lot of influence. Many of their outlandish ideas (evolution isn’t true, gay marriage is ‘bad’, guns are good) are anathema to many of America’s elite and successful people. But they are by no means a majority. The bard, church-going, literal Bible believers in America are still less than half of those who call themselves ‘religious’ and only around a third of the adult population, a figure that hasn’t changed hugely over the years. America has prospered and lead the world in Enlightenment thinking through many decades when its fundos were more numerous and noisy.

The Islamic world, we’re told, is seething with hatred for all things western and secular. The plight of the Palestinians, American heavy-handedness in Iraq and repressive, corrupt Arab regimes in all these things inflame mosque-goers and make it ever more likely that next Friday’s prayers could bring about the revolution we’re all told is coming. Well, no, actually. It’s true that many Muslims have huge issues with Washington at the moment. The Iraq invasion hasn’t gone down well in the sook or the bajar. And in Pakistan, you can find various bearded characters calling for jihad on a grand scale and paying tribute to Osama bin Laden in his hidey hole somewhere.

And yes, Saudi Arabia’s royal family is a collection of decadent crooks who would be tossed from power in a free election that might just elect a fiery preacher or two to a free parliament, were one to exist in Riyadh. Jordan, Egypt and Syria might follow suit, given such an opportunity. But there’s more than an element of anti-Muslim thinking at play if you take it further than that.

Iraqis, the most secular and aspirationally-Western people in the Arab world, don’t much like President Bush at the moment. But they love America. They still do. And so do the people of Kandah, Kabul, Lampur and Damascus. If love can somehow be defined as the desire to emulate economically and politically. The Muslim world wants democracy and free-level playing field market economics. It also wants respect for Islam and various other religious things. But this is not resurgent fundamentalism, nor by a long chalk.

As for the Hindus and Buddhists, I’m not much worried that their ancient faiths will post many problems to the rest of the world. Indian Hinduism in particular is thriving because it embraces modernism every chance it gets and the urbanisation of India is both reinvigorating and changing Hindu social practices for the better. Nepal, well, there’s a strong case to be made for Hindu reform here. But fundamentalism, as such, isn’t likely to pose much of a threat.

To all those Cassandra the, who look to the Next New Thing that endangers life as we know it, the clash of cultures or civilisations that will shake the foundations of what the Enlightenment has wrought, I offer a single thought, one to ponder and pray to your individual god that I’m wrong, China. Amazing economic growth. Nearly three quarters of US non-oil imports and rising. Authoritarian politics. Deep corruption. Huge population. Environmental degradation on a grand scale. An ancient culture devastated by communism that just might be tempted by assertive nationalism.

China. Keep your eye on Beijing. Forget the fundos. •
“I will never leave Nepal again”

I was jailed for a crime I never committed

My desire to become rich led me to Thailand. Eleven years ago, I had been making enough money for my family with the small business I ran. My daughters were just five and six years old.

When my friend invited me to Bangkok in 1993 to start a garment export business, I jumped at the chance of striking it rich. For two years I did quite well. It was around 1995 while touring the royal palaces that I was picked up by the police and taken to Bangkok police station.

Not knowing their language, I was transferred to Lard Yao jail for a crime I had never committed. I had no idea what was going on. I didn’t speak their language and my friend assured me there was nothing to worry about. They had picked me up because they thought I was one of a gang. The daughter-in-law of the Sikh household, who had been at the restaurant when suddenly the police came across six of his Thai and Burmese-Nepali friends. They confessed to the robbery of a Sikh’s house. They were being held for 18 months without trial.

I was innocent but the prosecutor turned it all around. The gang said that I was involved in a robbery of a Sikh’s house. They confessed to the robbery, so the judge sentenced me to 17 years and eight months of imprisonment. I defended myself with the help of a government lawyer but he did not make much of an effort. The prosecutor was more aggressive and provocative in his depositions.

All my friends testified that I was innocent and not a part of their gang. The daughter-in-law of the Sikh household, who had been at home during the robbery, had seen their faces. She told the police that I was not among them. During the court proceedings the police stated I was innocent but the prosecutor turned it all around. The other family members were made to say they had seen me. The daughter-in-law was not brought to court. The judge listened to the prosecutor and delivered his final verdict on 29 August, 1996.

I was taken to Lard Yao jail for a crime I had never committed. I thought of my 21-year-old wife and two young daughters. I did not know how they would survive without me. I had no future.

An American charity worker named Ben Parks and some missionaries helped me keep my hopes alive. Nine years later on 29 October, because of the efforts made by the activists, I was paroled by the Thai King Bhumibol and returned home without serving the full sentence.

So many Nepalis are serving life imprisonments in Bangkok and Lard Yao. Many of them are innocent and have been framed or were picked up by mistake like I was. Their trials were a sham, like mine was. Some, it must be said, were turned in by fellow-Nepalis. I met at least 16 Nepalis in both jails serving sentences from 15 years to life.

The human rights situation in Thai prisons is very bad. Our personal letters are opened and read by the prison authorities. Letters can only be written in English. The food is stale and dirty. I once found a dead mouse in my vegetable curry.

It was strange returning home. My daughters had grown into teenagers and they felt awkward calling me “Bai”. But now I have time to get to know them. I have learned my lesson. I will never go after money again. I will be satisfied with what I have. The best lesson I learnt in prison is to live my new life to the fullest, to savour every moment with my family and be thankful for this gift from the Almighty. I will now find fulfillment by helping those less fortunate than me. I will turn into a social worker and I’ll never leave Nepal again.

Madhab Nepali is a 28-year-old Dalit teacher whose students at the Mahendrodaya High School in Sindhupalchok’s Pati Banda are from various castes and creeds. But he has never been allowed into local tea shops.

“I don’t even try to enter because I’d probably be thrown out,” says Madhab, recalling an incident six years ago when a friend was beaten up for defying the social practice of Dalits not being allowed into eating places. But what pains Madhab even more is that there is discrimination even within Dalit society, where some ‘untouchables’ regard themselves as more ‘touchable’ than others in their community.

Madhab is about to complete his B Ed degree and is aware that the law of the land treats all citizens equally. Like many other educated Dalits, he knows that the constitution guarantees no person shall, on the basis of caste, be discriminated against as an untouchable, be denied access to any public place or be deprived of the use of public utilities. Still, he does not deny residual social exclusion. “It would just provoke conflict in society,” he reasons.

Bishnu Maya Sarki is in her 50s and explains the stark reality of Nepali village life. “We have been dominated, we are poor, we are not educated, we are helpless. We aren’t even confident enough to speak for ourselves. How can anyone fight injustice on an empty stomach?” she asks. But what makes it worse, says Bishnu Maya, is that Dalits are not united and races: “If we were, maybe things would be different.”

Here in the mountains north of Kathmandu Valley, despite education and media campaigns against untouchability, Dalits are still not allowed to enter teashops, restaurants and kitchens of families higher up in the caste ladder. They are discriminated at the public tap; the high caste families fill their taps first. “Even if we touch their gagers, they regard it as being defiled,” explains Nepali.

Paradoxes abound. Dogs roam freely inside the houses of high caste families, but Dalits aren’t allowed in. If Dalits do have a meal inside a high caste home, the family member throws bits of cow dung at the spot where they sat to purify it. “It is humiliating, how can cow dung be purer than human beings?” asks Harka Sarki.

Sadly, the social discrimination prevalent in mainstream society is reflected within Dalit society as well. Here, as in other parts of the country, some Dalits see themselves as higher in the caste hierarchy than others. The oppressed, in a desperate...
by the untouchables  
higher castes, but from fellow-Dalits

attempt to secure social status, sometimes turn oppressors. Madhav Nepali explains that some Kamis and Sarkis consider themselves higher in status than, for instance, Damais, who are not allowed to enter their kitchens. There are restrictions in marriage between Damais and Kamis. “In short, some Dalits impose the same set of discriminatory practices on other Dalits,” Madhav tells us, shaking his head.

Dalit leaders say their community can’t be blamed for such lingering internal discrimination. Since they grew up in an environment where discriminatory practices were normal, they follow the same tradition even though in their hearts they know it is wrong.

But 40-year-old Arjan Sarki, says the winds of change are blowing away the old practices. “Times are changing, the younger generation is more open and flexible,” he says. The local community runs adult literacy classes in Sarki’s house which people from all castes attend. “There is no restriction, there is no discrimination,” he says.

Madhav Nepali agrees. “People from supposedly higher castes would invite me over, if it wasn’t for their rigid parents,” he says. “There is a long way to go but change is coming.”

Majhis lose their livelihood

Conventional wisdom has it that roads bring development. But here on the banks of the Sun Kosi, at the junction of the Arniko and Jiri Highways, fisherfolk of the Majhi community still struggle to survive.

There are less and less fish in the river, the Majhi don’t own any land, and although the two highways are at their doorsteps, it hasn’t made a difference to the Majhis of Khadichaur in Sindhupalchok. So the community takes odd jobs as farm hands and restaurant helpers.

But not all Majhis have given up their traditional occupation. One member from a family, usually a young man, will still fish in the river while relatives are away working in the city. “Fishing is tedious and hard and doesn’t give you much in return,” says Dhan Bahadur Majhi, 19, readying the line that he will leave in the river overnight (see pic). Usually he catches a kg of fish, which he can sell for about Rs 35.

These days, Majhis are not the only fishers in the Sun Kosi. “Chhetris, Kamis, Paharis, Newars everybody fishes nowadays,” says Dhan Bahadur Majhi, adding that many are illegally killing fish by electric shock and this has reduced the catch in the Sun Kosi.

Dalit conference

The International Conference Against Caste Discrimination is being held 29 November-1 December in Kathmandu. Organised by the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) and International Dalit Solidarity Network, it is the first of its kind. According to DNF, the participants of this event are from countries where caste discrimination is still prevalent.
The unprecedented uprising in Daliyakh appears to have been a result of the unusually brutal methods that the comrades in this district have used to cow down the people. The rallies were a spontaneous outpouring of anger and they don’t appear to have been government-inspired. However, security forces and Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka did go to Daliyakh on Monday to attend the rally. Khadka even made a speech, assuring locals of security and relief support from the government. “We fully support the people’s uprising,” Khadka said amidst applause. An army base has been set up in Daliyakh to prevent Maoist attacks.

The Maoists appear to have realised that the negative publicity from Daliyakh could spread across the country and its Western Command in charge, Comrade Dhanak, issued a statement Wednesday apologising for the Daliyakh killings and the setting up of a three-member investigation panel. But that seems to be for outside consumption, in the district itself the retaliation has already begun: local rebels cut off the two water supply of the district headquarters on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the army appears to have scored a military victory by overrunning a Maoist supply base in Pandan as in far-western Nepal this week. Journalists taken there on Wednesday saw bodies and blood littering the jungles. Piles of socket bombs and grenades were scattered over a wide area. The battle for Pandan lasted six hours on Saturday night and commandos engaged the guerrillas in hand-to-hand combat on a steep slope. The army admits losing ten soldiers with 18 wounded and says 300 Maoists were killed. "

(With reports by Rameswor Bohara in Daliyakh and Shiva Gaonle in Pandan)
Getting businesslike

What’s it like starting a business in Nepal?

According to Doing Business in 2005, a global report put out by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the cost of starting a business in Nepal involves dealing with seven different procedures that take, on average, 21 days to be completed. Though both measures are lower than the

**STRICTELY BUSINESS**

Ashutosh Tiwari

regional average of nine procedures and 46 days, many small firms in Nepal do not even bother with the formality of registration.

That is because (and this is not quite in the report, which obtained its information primarily from Nepali lawyers who seemed to have furnished cautious explanations) apart from their reluctance to face the time-consuming bureaucratic hassles, business owners often have neither the extra cash with which to grease the palms of relevant officers nor the manpower needed to work the system. With this, the government loses revenue, the business owners remain cut off from easily accessible credit lines and other business-oriented formal facilities and an informal economy builds up, occupying a share of almost 40 percent of Gross National Income, as in Nepal’s case.

The IFC report details what different countries around the world have done to make it easy for their citizens to take risks to become entrepreneurs. Last year, the Portuguese Entrepreneurs’ Association, for instance, opened 10 business help centres that act as ‘single access points’: places where representatives of various agencies gather to assist entrepreneurs complete the necessary paperwork. In Nepal there is no reason why the FNCCI and its district branches cannot double up as platforms to be such help centres for starters. After all, it’s not only the established businesses that need to patronise FNCCI, all those interested in business should be able to find something of value for a fee at their local FNCCI chapters.

The report talks about putting forms on the web, thereby giving the same standard information to all new businesses. Such a process makes it easier for firms to submit documents online. Of course, the paper option will still be there for those without Internet access. In Vietnam and Moldavia, says the report, this web-based approach more than halved the time required to file business registrations. That is why, as talks related to e-governance once again heat up in Nepal in a run-up to January’s CAN Info-Tech, Nepal software firms push the idea of putting relevant forms online to the Office of Company Registrar and other government bureaucracies.

The report also mentions that 43 countries have adopted statutory time limits on registrations. Of these, four have added a ‘silence is consent’ rule. The idea is that once businesses submit the paperwork, they are automatically considered registered after a few days. This method helps speed up the registration work by shifting power to start business from the hands of bureaucrats to those of entrepreneurs.

True, some Nepali academics given to expressing romantic notions about the supposed attractiveness of firms that make up our informal economy. But the reality is that’s where the majority of our working poor toil — under unbreathing conditions without health insurance, pension benefits, procedures to file grievances and rights to form unions. The first step toward addressing their plight is to make it easier for the businesses they work for to be legally registered so that they become a part of the formal economy. Only then can our businesses be serious about growth, which ultimately benefits everyone by increasing employment levels and employees’ incomes.
Sankhuwasabha is still smarting from the loss, but the rest of the country is probably better off

KUNDA DIXIT
in KHANDBARI

I t was going to be Nepal’s biggest hydroelectric project, and had construction gone ahead the Arun III would now be nearing completion.

With a price tag of $1.082 billion, it would have cost more than the kingdom’s annual budget and generated 202 megawatts from the mighty Arun River near this town in eastern Nepal.

Ten years after the project was abandoned, a rusted gate at a walled compound in Timlungtar is the only forlorn reminder of this controversial scheme. Some here have still not forgiven Kathmandu-based activists who killed the project that they thought would have transformed eastern Nepal.

“We lost out, and so did the country,” says Shyam Sundar Udas of the FNCCI’s local chapter. “If Arun had gone ahead we would all have been prosperous.” Businessman Tilewor Shrestha in Timlungtar shakes his head: “We woke up one day and found out it was just a dream.”

Compared to other parts of the country, Sankhuwasabha district is relatively better off: there are phones that work. Food is plentiful. Several daily flights connect Timlungtar to Kathmandu and Biratnagar, and electricity is regular. The hills below Dingha and Khandbari that were denuded two decades ago are now covered in thick community forests. Cardamom farms have injected cash into the local economy and new tea estates are coming up.

Whatever progress is seen here is because of local effort. Because after Arun III was abandoned, governments in Kathmandu abandoned Sankhuwasabha too.

The World Bank itself was badly burnt, it has kept off hydropower ever since and only recently hinted at taking a new look at potential projects. It was on 5 August 1985, after a year of mounting international protests that the World Bank’s newly-appointed president James Wolfensohn announced he was pulling out of Arun. The Japanese and German governments were under fierce pressure at home too.

Arun III was one of the first examples of internet-based international activism. The International Rivers Network, Friends of the Earth Japan and from Dhanur to the dam site near Num cost Rs 50 million per km, when other roads in Nepal cost only Rs 6 million to build. Because the road would not be ready in time, the project even planned to fly equipment on heavy lift Chinook helicopters from Biratnagar.

They had its supporters, and they were not just in Sankhuwasabha. Former finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat says, “We lost in many ways, we will have to wait another ten years to develop a good project the size of Arun, and about $400 million in committed grants and loans had to be written off.” Shankar Sharma, now with the National Planning Commission, agrees: “If the rate of return calculation made sense, it would have worked, and the road itself would have benefited the people through the multiplier effect.”

But Arun Kirkari, who now heads Rural Reconstruction Nepal and a Timlungtar native opposed the project even though it made him a lot of enemies here. “My argument was how could one of the poorest countries in the world afford to produce electricity more expensively than the United States?” recalls Kirkari.

After Arun was dumped, for half the cost and in half the time, smaller public and private projects produced the same amount of electricity Arun III would have, he says.

In the decade since, the road from Hile is still crawling up the Arun Valley and has only reached Legwaga. Fed up with waiting, people here dug their own road, air-lifted jeeps, and now carry diesel in doks up from Hile so locals can commute. Says Kirkari’s ex-mayor Kiran Slakya: “We realised no one would come to help us, we would have to do it ourselves.”

The Arun River starts in Tibet, north of Kathmandu, and flows eastwards winding its way around Makalu to slice through the Himalaya and meet the Sun Kosi near Dhanur. The river’s gorge offers the perfect route for a north-south highway joining India and China (see box) and would make a revival of Arun III finally feasible. At a public meeting in Kathmandu on 20 November to push the road, locals were wary about having their hopes dashed once more.

“We have been let down so often, we take it with a pinch of salt,” says FNCCI’s Udas, “but the Koshi Highway would not just benefit us, it would benefit the whole country as well as India and China.”

Hunt Rainagi Dahal, Sankhuwasabha’s ex-MP from the UML, admits Arun III was a loss, but he has no time to be upset. Even as MP he was busy staging sit-ins at Singha Darbar to force the government to complete the Khandbari road.

After parliament was dissolved, he started small hydropower projects he jokingly called “baby Aruns” with local financing and expertise. Dahal has now set up a trust to lease a power plant in Kathmandu damaged by the Manis, sell electricity to the grid and plough the profit to run three colleges here. (See: “An alternative current”, #204 and “People power”, #166)

Says Dahal: “We can’t say how sad the Bank pulled out, or there is a war going on, and fold our hands. For our own self-respect we have to work to improve our living standards and the Kosi highway is one way of doing that.”

Ten years after abandoning Arun III

For decades, Nepal played off neighbours China and India for aid. Now it seems to realise that it can benefit from their friendship for trade.

A highway linking India to China via eastern Nepal’s Arun river valley would be the fastest all-weather trade route between Calcutta and Halda ports in India to southeastern China. Current options through the 4,000 m Nathu La in Sikkim is difficult and snowbound four months in a year.

But if the 310 km Jogbani-Kimathang highway through Nepal is opened, it would be a shortcut. Furthermore, half the road already exists and only a 140 km stretch, most of it from Num to Kimathang on the Tibet border, needs to be built. Nepal is urging China to help build it.

During an inspection visit to Kathmandu last week, Chinese ambassador Sun Heping said: “China is in favour of opening more border links with Nepal and will look favourably into the proposal.” However, analysts say China may be interested in first finishing the Rasuwa-Dhading Ink and Kathmandu’s Outer Ring Road.

India requested Nepal to host a trans-Himalayan highway to China at a bilateral meeting earlier this year. Nepal subsequently offered three options: Bhairawa-Mustang, Birganj-Rasuwa and Jogbani-Kimathang. Of the three, the last is the most direct route.

Khandbari can do locals have been let down before and have already started a symbolic One Rupee Each’ campaign to raise funds for the highway. “Even if no one cares, we want to show we care,” says local youth Dipan Kumar Shrestha, who speaksha the drive (see pic).
The proposed Outer Ring Road completely ignores past plans for Kathmandu Valley’s organic growth

The residents of Kathmandu see it every day: a city straining to cope with urbanisation. Unplanned settlements, water shortage, overcrowded streets, air and water pollution have all but wiped out a Valley once known for the harmony of its architecture and fertility of its land. Indeed, Kathmandu Valley’s unique heritage is derived from this rural-urban symbiosis. This has been taken into account in numerous urban development plans in the past 35 years, starting with the 1969 Kathmandu Valley Physical Development Plan. The challenge has always been to translate the plans into reality. In 2000, the IUCN’s Kathmandu 2020 study tried to address the issue of urban sprawl and how to contain it. The government has strongly backed the containment policy and advocates densification of already settled areas of the Valley contained in that report.

Containment keeps the population within given boundaries and controls urban sprawl. In Kathmandu Valley it makes sense because land resource is limited and there has been unplanned growth in the past. Since the cost of infrastructure is high and there is a need to sustain the Valley’s ecological balance, Kathmandu 2020 proposed to keep at least 300 persons per hectare (ppha) population density with optimal 500 pppa.

According to the 2001 Census only the city core of Kathmandu has a density of more than 500 pppa. In the rest of the metro area, population density is 150 pppa or below but there is alarming growth rate in the outlying VDCs. Out of the 20 urbanising VDCs 10 have population growth rates higher than six percent per year. Kapan scores highest with 12.12 percent, Bopali has 13.41 and Gongja Bh has 13.46 percent.

In its 20-year plan, Kathmandu 2020 wanted to limit the built-up and non-builtup ratio of land use to 40:60 by 2021, which is the accepted upper limit for ecological balance. By 2001 this ratio had already topped 32:68. The result: fragmentation of land, narrow and meandering access roads, no attention paid to drainage and slopes, and no consideration of land suitability which is turning the Valley into a huge slum.

Kathmandu 2020 tried to address the problem by introducing a rural-urban boundary to be maintained by improving roads, water, power, phones and sewages in already developed areas and restricting development in the agricultural zones by not providing infrastructure. The gazetted document states: “...the provision of regional trunk infrastructures such as highway or arterial road, drinking water...need to be consistent with the goals of compact urban form, so they don’t help further urban sprawl”.

In hindsight, many planners believe that premature construction of the existing Ring Road in 1983 was one of the main causes of haphazard urban sprawl in the Valley. In the absence of a connecting road network and other infrastructure, the Ring Road has been overrun by construction. Not a single major link road has been added after the Ring Road was built. A road designed as an arterial access (with average vehicular speeds of 80 kmph) is compelled to cater to all types of vehicles and can hardly average 30 kmph.

In 1993, the Japanese aid group JICA made an extensive transportation study of Kathmandu Valley. Building on land use and other strategic plans it suggested several short, medium and long-term remedies. One was for a part of the Outer Ring Road to link Budhanilkante-Thimi-Lubhu-Bungamati since the existing Ring Road does not cover the eastern end of the Valley. There were other short term and medium term proposals and almost none of them were implemented.

The Outer Ring Road proposal to be built with a Chinese grant is considerably different from the JICA alignment. There are questions that need to be answered about its feasibility given the land use, traffic load, economic viability and how it fits with the urban containment strategy.

The preliminary map appearing in the media of the Outer Ring Road running along the foothills of the Valley rim does not show strong justification. Worse, this is a supply side management approach and completely ignores the Kathmandu 2020 urban-rural divide to ensure the Valley’s balanced growth.

We need an Outer Ring Road but not now. Also, the proposed alignment ignores the Kathmandu 2020 strategy plan and would seriously threaten the future ecological balance of the Valley. Then there is the question of
priority: given the state of the country does the capital deserve yet another free infrastructure? Politicians like to heap such large projects to the country as a legacy of their tenure. But such desires must match overall strategies and national priorities. The tragedy of Kathmandu’s planning is that it has historically been used by politicians and betrayed by experts.

There are two options to go with this road project: switch from an outer ring road to an inner ring road following corridors along the Kholka, Bagmati, Bishnumati and in the northern part of the Sohakhote-Hastings link to meet Dhopikhola. This decision would be perfectly in line with the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works and the Kathmandu 2020 containment policy. It will also be easy to implement since the preliminary design work on three sides have already been completed.

The second option demands strong political commitment: bring the whole Kathmandu Valley (at least the area encircled by the proposed Outer Ring Road) under planned development. It will be a challenge but with our experience in land pooling, its possible with nominal investment from the government. Taking the Outer Ring Road as an opportunity, there should be political commitment not to allow land in Kathmandu Valley for construction without designated infrastructure. Strict enforcement would ensure that the Kathmandu 2020 urban rural boundary proposal is respected. Municipalities and VDCs could then plan and manage growth.

The key challenge is the lack of political commitment. Land is valuable in this vertical country and being the capital it is even more scarce and precious. Any intervention that undermines land use would be suicidal. We can stop repeating mistakes, learn from them and not blunder again by going for an Outer Ring Road for all the wrong reasons. ●


Palitra Sunder Joshi used to be with the Planning Unit of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City and is now a lecturer at the Institute of Engineering.
Now, regime change in Korea

The makers of foreign-policy hawks that promoted the 2003 invasion of Iraq is pressing President George W Bush to adopt a more coercive policy toward North Korea, despite strong opposition from China and South Korea.

North Korea ranked high in bilateral talks between Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao at the summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Santiago, Chile, although the final communiqué did not address the issue. Bush reportedly tried to make clear that his patience toward Pyongyang and its alleged efforts to stir up trouble was not forever. Talks was fast running out and that Washington should soon push for stronger measures against North Korea in the absence of progress toward an agreement under which Pyongyang will dismantle its alleged nuclear program. Bush claimed that if this interlocutors, which included the leaders of the four other parties, Russia, China, Japan and South Korea, agreed with him. But Hu and South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun have opposed a strong move against Pyongyang.

William Kristol, an influential neo-conservative who also chairs the Project for the New America Century (PNAC), faxed a statement entitled "Anger in Beijing" to foreign-policy analysts and young "opinion leaders" in the capital. PNAC has Vice President Dick Cheney, Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Cheney’s powerful chief of staff, Lewis Libby as signers of its 1997 charter. (IPS)

Thai-Malaysia tensions

Friday sessions in mosques across Malaysia are often read from texts prepared by the government to explain and underline the undemocratic nature of undemocratic in Malaysia. This month, however, some of the sermons has a discernible difference. Where before the dialect was again the glorification of Palestine by Israel, the UI-led war against Iraq, and a military action in Muslim-dominated Chechnya, now a new word has emerged generating anger among the country’s 15 million Muslims. It is Takbai, the town in Thailand where 80 Muslim protesters suffocated to death after police detention on 25 October when 1,300 people were staffed into vehicles for at least six hours.

"Islam is under attack right here at our doorstep," said a preacher over loudspeakers at a mosque in the upscale Bangsar suburb on Friday. "The Thai militia is slaughtering our Muslim brothers in southern Thailand." Across Southern Thailand, the anger against the Thai killings is pervasive. Extensive media coverage of the tragedy has turned the name and the tragedy of Takbai into a household word and a rallying cry. Malaysia government and Malaysian intellectuals telephoned Thai Prime Minister Thaksin after the killings to voice his concern. Taking note of the tensions between countries, the Malaysian premier offered to send a team of Malaysian bar officials to support Prime Minister Thaksin Tun Razak, for talks. But to date Bangkok has not responded. The Takbai killings have also brought tourism, largely from Malaysia to southern Thai towns, to a standstill, especially after Malaysia warned its citizens against heading north. (IPS)

Pipeline dreams to be reality

KABUL—Prospects for the trans-Afghan pipeline seem good with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) indicating that it is set to launch a preliminary report on the $2 billion project linking the vast gas field in Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan. The American oil and gas company, UNOCAL,还要 leverage its 20-year contract signed in 2002 to pay $300 million to Afghanistan per year as a premium for using the land. Half of the 1,800-km long pipeline will pass through Afghan territory to support from Damascus to Karachi in the Gwadar port in Pakistan.

The trans-Afghan pipeline has been one of the most controversial issues among western political and major world gas companies, including UNOCAL and Briar, since 1995. The three countries involved in the project will hold a meeting in Islamabad at the end of the month before the final details will be announced. Oil analysts in the region say, whoever takes the project will clearly reap millions of dollars each year from the venture. But Afghanistan’s security has been a major concern for the investors. Earlier Briar withdrew from the program and analysts suggest this was due to security reasons. And UNOCAL’s role within the ADB venture is still not clearly defined.

The world’s largest pipeline of gas, is desperate to get its huge reserves out to the market and thereby boost up its weak economy by presenting its gas pipelines south to central and south-east Asia. The US-Asian pipeline will run to Gwadar and onto India from where the gas will then be transferred to Bangkok tankers.

The three partners have discussed how to ensure security for the pipeline in all three countries and to specify the portion for India in this project. Saiman Amin, a former UNOCAL adviser, said the pipeline project facing $500 million project. (IPS)

Economically, Asia’s two giants are becoming more alike every day

China and India are converging

Following pages from the management consultancy firm McKinsey & Company’s two points of view on one of the hottest topics of debate — China and India: The next competitive edge to watch.

The contributors, a Harvard University professor and two McKinsey consultants, appear to agree on one very except that the two economies have adopted opposite growth models: China’s way since 1979 has been state capita has been private enterprise. All three contributors did a good job of explaining China’s powerhouse’s strengths and offering insights about which model may triumph. Yet, none discussed the possibility that the paths followed by China and India may actually converge.

For the next 10 years, China will keep trumping India in industries that rely on ‘hard’ infrastructure: roads, ports and power. The Harvard Business University professor Tarun Khanna says in his essay in the McKinsey Quarterly that China will be ahead of China in biotechnology, computer software and other areas where "soft" infrastructure like a ready-tended pool and private enterprise matters more than physical capital, he adds.

As for what happens after 10 years, "The conventional view that the Chinese model is unambiguously better of the two is wrong in many ways," says Khanna, a professor of strategy at Harvard Business School.

"Each has its advantages. India opened up its economy in 1991. 13 years after China. Indian policy makers welcomed foreign direct investments, which domestic companies should get money to expand. India showed the way to foreigners because of its colonial past, depended on its local entrepreneurs, who as a group had much free access to credit and capital markets than their counterparts in China. India has $24 billion in foreign direct investment, 10 times as much as India. China’s expansion has outstripped India’s six percent annual growth by an average of four percentage points since 1980. The $1.4 trillion Chinese economy, Asia’s second biggest after Japan, is three times India’s. "China opens up further to foreign-direct investment, in part, China is very, very well that discover that the country’s more laissez-faire approach has nurtured the conditions that will enable free enterprise and economic growth to flourish more easily in the long run."

That may not happen, Jonathan Woetzel, a director in McKinsey’s Shanghai office, says in his essay. It’s true that the Chinese government decides which companies should grow. It’s also true that an efficient market would have allocated capital better and achieved the same amount of economic growth without the estimated $200 billion in bad loans that now burden the four major Chinese state-owned lenders and 11 commercial banks, in addition to the $20 billion transferred to asset managers since 1999.

Yet, “It is not an efficient market and the Indian model,” Woetzel writes, “essentially one with relatively little funding, whether by the government or private sector, could not have achieved as much growth for the Chinese economy as the approach China’s government took.”

Diana Farrell, director of the McKinsey Global Institute provides a third view. The auto industry is one where the Chinese and the Indian growth models are in close competition, she says. India’s car industry is half China’s size of 1.76 million units (in 2003). Still, the productivity of foreign joint ventures in China is lower than Japan or the U.K. In India, local engineers have been innovative with their designs. The Mumbai-based Mahindra & Mahindra has created Scorpio, a sports utility vehicle that sells for a fraction of an equivalent car in the United States, says Farrell. Does the auto industry hold the key? Yes, India’s laissez-faire system, which encourages local entrepreneurship, works better than China’s combination of state capitalism and foreign investments? Not so fast, says Woetzel. Look at Goodyear Automotive Holdings, a Chinese maker of cheap cars that is not state-supported.

Goyal has about five percent of the Chinese market and aims for 10 percent by 2010. “In five or 10 years’ time,” Woetzel predicts, “at least a third of the Chinese auto industry will be completely private. And this will have started with the state saying, ‘We want to build a car industry.’ That provides us with a fourth point of view. Communist China started with state capitalism because it had no entrepreneurs. It’s now moving toward a free market in capital and ideas to resemble India. Democratic India had a strong tradition of private enterprise that blossomed around a weak state: the next step for India is to improve its physical infrastructure, something that will need a strong political will. In other words, what India needs now is a strong state. A more India-like China and a more China-like India, that’s how the two growth models may ultimately fuse. On a 10-year time frame, the rivalry between the two nations is a race too close to call. In 2015, it may look like a race both can win. (Bloomberg)
Holland after van Gogh

As racism spreads, the Dutch realise tolerance is the issue, not differences

The murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh and the ensuing arson attacks against mosques, churches, and Islamic schools have caused more soul-searching in Dutch homes in the last week than in the past two decades. The old Netherlands, it seems, has ceased to be, never to return.

ANALYSIS

Nobert Both and Nabil Taouati

It is said that various immigrant groups in the Netherlands lack the ability to ‘cleanse themselves’ through honest self-appraisal and criticism. There are many who want to change. Non-committal multiculturalism has long kept the conservation of Dutch Moroccans and Dutch Turks hidden from the public eye.

Among immigrants soul-searching is closely related to belonging and commitment, which in practice boils down to feeling part of society and responsible for the city, neighbourhood, and street you live in.

We native Dutch find it hard to hold a mirror to ourselves. We are bad listeners and air our views whether or not we have thought deeply about them. As a result, many people no longer understand themselves, which makes it hard for them to understand others. Freedom of expression is becoming a caricature.

When asked what it was like to be interviewed by Theo van Gogh, European Commissioner Frans Balkenende said, “He was impertinent, and that is a good thing, he was offensive, and that is not.” It is as simple as that. In today’s Netherlands, assertiveness is seen as a good thing, modesty as a form of self-chastisement. Respect is for wimps.

Moral relativism has damaged public life. Many youngsters now see politics as a kind of computer game. It is no longer about messages or content, it is just one more form of entertainment, and what matters is who wins and who loses. Context has been lost.

Extreme ideas offer an alternative compass to disorientated souls like Mohammed Bouyeri, van Gogh’s suspected murderer. He is not so much a product of zealous imams from rural Morocco as of the west’s information society.

The gospel of Muslim extremism has found a global market through the Internet. Something similar is happening on the extreme-right, with ‘white power’ offering an apparent certainty to youngsters who are adrift.

The real struggle is about ideas. What is ominous is that extremists realise this more clearly than the moderate, silent majority, who find the noise irritating but do not know how to start a serious dialogue.

Meanwhile, tolerance degenerates into multicultural segregation. We live in isolation from each other. The Turkish-Dutch headmaster of the Muslim school in Uden that was burned down after van Gogh’s murder voiced the inhibitions we feel when he asked rhetorically, “Is the enemy not within us?”

A revived permissive society is not the answer. The state must battle terrorism, public space must not be abandoned to extremists and Islam in Europe must adapt to the continent. People who live in a society they hate, amidst people they despise, cannot contribute to a shared future.

Life in Europe will only remain worth living if all cultures and religions accept the laws that represent common interest.

A European Islam is needed urgently. It can be given shape by, for example, training imams in Europe, encouraging mosques to promote social cohesion in their neighbourhood and by a more active participation of Muslims in public debate.

At the same time, native Europeans must learn to accept that Islam may offer new vantage points on such moral issues as euthanasia, abortion, individuality and solidarity. The Netherlands need not be the focus of international religious conflict. What is precious must be preserved and what enriches must be absorbed. This process must begin in school. Children must learn that they do not live in a monoculture but in a pluralist society bound together by universal values and common laws.

They must learn that critical thought is valuable, and doubt is healthy. Restoring the past is not an option. Rudderless societies are easy prey for bigotry.

Nobert Both is a political scientist and co-author of the book Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime; Nabil Taouati is a business economist.

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Dailekh’s brave mothers

The women of Dailekh did something the men never had the courage to do

Chitra Singh Gaunlet in Raphani, 23 November

“We don’t need Prachandapath. You can’t kill people anymore.” These are the anti-Maoist slogans the people of Dailekh have been shouting for the last two weeks. Young and old, men and women, they protested openly against the rebels. Once sympathisers of the Maoists, they are now protesting the rebels. Once sympathisers of the Maoists, they are now protesting the Maoists. The Royal Nepali Army attacked their villages but now they have to hide from the rebellious public. They are facing the consequences of having taken the people for granted. It is time for them to acknowledge that the sickles of the mass are more powerful than the AK-47s of a few armed militiamen.

The Maoist rebellion did not start with evil intentions. It was necessary to give birth to a party with a powerful and revolutionary ideology to restore the people’s rule of law. The Maoists made a positive impact on the people in the early phases of their movement. But since then, it has been ridden with its own contradictions. At a time when consolidation is needed and not expansion, Maoists have lost more by going underground.

The Dailekh rebellion will spread across the country if the Maoists do not apologise. The mass protests are staged with very good intentions and both the state and the rebels should create an environment where the people can breathe in peace. If injustice against the people continues, mass fury will not be contained. It will lash out at both the state and the Maoists. The Royal Nepali Army indicated provision of security if the elections took place. This will only lead to an authoritarian rule, what the people need is peace. Anti-Maoist uprising in Dailekh owes much to the women who did what the men did not have the courage to do. To rebel against the Maoists is not easy but such was the courage to do. To rebel against the Maoists is not easy but such was the courage to do. To rebel against the Maoists is not easy but such was the courage to do. To rebel against the Maoists is not easy but such was the courage to do. To rebel against the Maoists is not easy but such was the courage to do. To rebel against the Maoists is not easy but such was the courage to do.

Mothers’ army

Kantipur, 25 November

The Maoists had locked up all schools for over a month and student bodies requested us to talk to them about calling off the school strike. We travelled to the west of the district where we met Chandra Shah, a teacher who had just returned from Dullu. He gave us a news peg. “Last night, villagers beat up half a dozen Maoist leaders,” he told us. The security forces had also headed for the place where the locals had beaten up rebel district leaders.

What had actually happened was that the security forces had killed the “people’s committee” chief Raju Rajacharya when he tried to run away from them. The rebels had forced Rajacharya to join the committee. When the rebels came to cover Raju’s body with a Maoist flag, the villagers beat them up. Raju’s sister and brother-in-law saved rebel leader Gopal telling people not to act like Maoists. The people were furious and even willing to die. In the last two weeks, the number of anti-Maoist demonstrations has snowballed and spread across 14 VDCs. Starting in Dullu, it spread to Badalpani, Gamanu, Rawalkot, Pabhaka and Chiplipahat. The women started it by coming out into the streets armed with sticks and soon the men joined them. Husbands had no choice but to
support their wives. Their protest was so strong that five-dozen Maoist rebels including four chiefs and dozens of the village people’s government surrendered to the public.

In Dulla, women stood guard with their sticks and began interrogating us perhaps thinking we were Maoists. We said, “We are journalists.” They replied, “Why have you journalists come so late?” This kind of protest has not been organised anywhere else in the country,” one woman told us. “Our protests should be aired on your radio so everyone in the country and especially the ministers know what’s happened here.” On 22 November, more than 20,000 people joined the protests in Dulla. Later in the evening, the villagers had a big feast and animals were slaughtered. The women who stood guard celebrated throughout the night dancing at their sentry posts.

Deuba exit

Deshkantur, 21 November

Six months after his reappointment as prime minister, Shri Bahadur Deuba has been asked to resign by the royal palace. It has charged him with failing to restore peace and of being unable to bridge the CPM (ULML), which the palace believes is creating trouble.

Deuba refused and the palace then reportedly told him he had to go. Arzu Deuba reportedly sent a message to the palace saying her husband would resign and that was when the king and queen attended a dinner hosted by the Deubas at Baluwat on 16 November. The chairman of the World Hindu Federation, former General Bhairav Krishna, told him he had to go. In the end, one who told Deuba the king wanted him to step down. The palace is poised the present coalition government has been a non-performer. It is angry at the way the UML opposed the government’s decisions on the ordinance of the royal palace’s expenditure, on holding elections and it raised the infamous issue of the Dausam government that the opponents doted out of the national cofur. Arzu Deuba has been given a seven-day deadline which if missed, will result in the palace sacking the prime minister once again. To seek Deuba’s resignation now appears to be a strategic move. If Deuba announced election dates he would put the palace in a fix because it would not have an excuse to sack Deuba. It would be too late to sack him. When Deuba was reinstated six months ago, it was on condition that his government begin elections before mid March.

Consensus needed

Shalija Acharya in Janakpur, 20 November

Almost three decades ago, BP Koirala said a national consensus was needed to save Nepal. Only then could the country form a constitution that provided space for the king and all political parties. If amended, even the Maoists could be brought into the mainstream. The two forces that can bring stability in this country now are the monarchy and the Nepali Congress. The monarchy may fall short on some issues but it is known as the symbol of unity. The Nepali Congress has become an institution representing stability because of its struggle and things could improve if these two forces joined hands. The monarchy however, made its biggest mistake when King Gyanendra readily dissolved the parliament on Sher Bahadur Deuba’s recommendation. He should have allowed the Supreme Court to decide as his brother had done in 1999. Parliament is a forum where differences between the king, the people and the political parties are sorted out. If the king wishes democracy to thrive in Nepal, he must reinstate parliament. This move can save the country. The Maoists may have demanded a constituent assembly but we need not get carried away. The world is against terrorism. When my party, the Nepali Congress accepted the constituent assembly and refused as possible alternatives, I disagreed. I said that the party had departed from its political principles.

Rolpa roads

Nepal Samacharpatra, 23 November

ROLPA—For the first time after they began the ‘people’s war’ in Rolpa and Rukum, the Maoists have started development work. A road project was launched recently in Gairung, Deukheli, Thawang in Rolpa and Chunyang in Rukum under orders of Maoist supremo Prachanda and joint decision by the Magar Autonomous People’s Government. Locals are participating in the construction of a 91 km road which will take three years to finish. “The plan is to stretch the road from Nawalgunj to Thawang,” says Comrade Prashant, coordinator of the road construction committee under the All-Nepal Revolutionary People’s Council. The Council says it started the road in response to local demand. The Maoists say people from other districts will also help in the construction and a brigade will be mobilised to ensure security during construction, states Comrade Bibeks of the Magar Pradesh. All schoolteachers and students based at the construction sites will be mobilised for a week. According to Santosh Buda, chief of Magar Autonomous State, a budget of Rs 10 million has been allocated for the work and 200,000 people will benefit.

People rise up

Editorial in Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 November

Villagers for 25 village development committees in Dang have joined the anti-resistance campaign and as a result, the rebels are on the run. Some of those rising up against the Maoists have been killed. The locals in Dalikhel have set an example for the rest of the country. They have shown that the people have a limit for patience and tolerance. If any force crosses that limit, they will have to face the wrath of the people. The people of Dullu were happy to see the security forces arrive but they now run the risk of being hit by a rebel counter attack. Ensuring their safety and resettlement is the duty of the government. Only if the government lives up to its duty will the recent speeches of the ministers in Dullu make any sense.

Uninsured jobs

Kantiapur, 23 November

More than 20 Nepali migrant workers come home in coffins from Qatar every month according to the Foreign Ministry. The deaths take place due to industrial accidents, road accidents and sickness. Most Nepalis in the Gulf are from the hills and they usually fall ill and die due to the parching heat of the Middle East. The number of those killed in road accidents is also significant and are attributed to rules on driving on the right side of the road. The recent death of five Nepalis while trying to clean a septic tank in Qatar is because of lack of training. The Non-Resident Nepalis Association in Qatar, Badri Prasad Pandey, said they would advise his people to use simple masks. “We have begun training sessions for such workers,” he said. Pandey added that NRNA workers in the Gulf are not so insured but they have a soft time getting compensation. In normal cases, they have to fight legal battles. In Qatar, workers get insurance worth Rs one million if they pay only Rs 2,500.

Nepal can benefit from this railway service also once the highway is built. Benifit just the eastern region but will also increase economic relations

DAMAK—A gang of armed robbers raped three women and two young girls from two families and terrorised the whole village in Dhimil Basti. The dacoits came to the village on Saturday evening and entered each house. They tied up the parents and dragged the girls aged 10, 12, 15, 17 and 18 outside. The girls were raped and then rubbed. The children were too scared and ashamed to report to the police. The police on the other hand are doing nothing. They are waiting for the victims to file charges. The villagers accused the police for not taking action even after receiving reports about what was happening.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS
Revolutions devour their own children

from Simon Bolívar: “He who serves the revolution, ploughs the sea.” The author, a revolutionary himself, seems to have a soft spot for the non-ideological rebellion of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa in Mexico’s Chiaspas region.

Then it’s time to quote Lenin who rather recklessly declared: “Revolutions are locomotives of history. Drive them full speed ahead and keep them on rails.” Exactly how to prevent a revolution from being a runaway train seems to be the question, as Russia’s Red Terror, Mao’s Cultural Revolution and Brother Number One’s Cambodian genocide would later show.

The most heart-rending story in the book is that of Rosa Luxemburg, who was silenced by soldiers unwittingly preparing the ground for the rise of Hitler in Germany. The author quotes Oscar Wilde: “It is personalities, not principles, that move the age as an epiphany to her momentous life. Luxemburg lives long after her death in the memories of her admirers all over the world.

The tale of Japanese Tenneso, on the other hand, is full of hyperbole about loyalty, betrayal and redemption of legendary samurais. The only notable quote in the entire section is from Emperor Hirohito: “The ties between the emperor and his people do not depend on myths and legends. They are not predicated on the false conception that their emperor is divine.”

The chapter on the struggles of Che Guevara in Cuba and Bolivia is riveting mainly because it is written as a news report. Commandant Guevara is hunted like a rabbit in the Dead Earth of Bolivia and killed mercilessly after his capture. The author blames, perhaps rightly, Cuban strongman Fidel Castro and the Soviet Union for cutting him loose, and absolves the CIA of complicity. If true, one of the most charismatic revolutionaries the world has ever known was done in by his own comrades. Ironically, it is Che who has become immortal as an emblem of revolution just as the non-violent revolutionary Gandhi has become the emblem of an alternative path.

Erik Dorschmi, a veteran of war reporting, can’t seem to forgive the American establishment for the mess it made in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution in the 70s. The Shah failed to realise the futility of divine authority in the post-world war and tried to live by the dictum of Louis XIV: d’et et moi. The Shah ruled absolutely with complete faith in the unfailing support of the Americans. Ultimately, when the streets of Tehran began to resound with the slogan ‘Death to the Shah’, his sponsors in the CIA and State Department ‘threw him out like a dead mouse’.

The book is racy and jumps from one chapter to the next with effortless ease. The thread running through them concerns the desirable traits of a ruler. Dorschmi, writes in the prologue: “Throughout history it has been a weakness of those in power, men who failed when the situation called for strong, even brutal measures, that allowed the barbarous to take charge.”

That’s certainly account of history but it fails to present the complete picture. No less often, the fault lies in the tendency of rulers to predict the future on the basis of the past. Since history runs a zipping course linear-thinking leaders fall off its pages the way ‘incorruptible’ Robespierre, ‘courageous’ Che, ‘glib-talking’ Trotsky did despite their resoluteness. And just as Louis XVI, Wilhelm II, and Tsar Nicholas did due to their indecisiveness, procrastination, and frailty.

After 9/11, it has become clear that Americans are still pursuing their material dreams. But while that may be enough of an objective to live, causes for the are much more complex.

To quote Dorschmi: ‘Revolutions are waged and decided in the minds of individuals, their cutting edge is words, not swords.’

Whisper of the Blade
by Erik Dorschmi
pp: 392
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The AIDS crisis

1 December is World AIDS Day and South Asia is at a critical stage of the epidemic as infections top eight million

A sia, the world’s most populous region with 3.9 billion people, has long been identified by the United Nations as prone to an AIDS epidemic. In 1999, about 7 million people were infected in the region. The number of infected Asians jumped by one million over the past year, bringing the total to 8 million, according to UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation. Some 5.1 million of those live in India, the highest number in the world except for South Africa. China had some 2.2 million new infections since 2001 to take the total to 4 million. Infections among East Asian women jumped by 56 percent over the same period, representing the largest global increase for women.

Women have seen higher rates of infection than men because it is easier for them to get HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, through heterosexual intercourse. Some 2.3 million of the 8.2 million people currently living with HIV in Asia are women, an increase of 56 percent since 2001. Nearly 50 percent of the 3.4 million people infected with HIV worldwide are women.

The report said illegal drug users were the second largest factor in the spread of HIV in many Asian countries, particularly in Indonesia, Nepal, Vietnam and parts of China. One in two injecting drug users in Jakarta now test positive for HIV, while in cities such as Pontianak in Indonesia, more than 70 percent of drug injectors are being found to be HIV-positive. The report cited. It recommended more nations adopt opiate substitution and needle-exchange programs to cut down on the use of dirty needles.

HIV epidemics were already deep entrenched in countries such as India, Myanmar and China where current anti-AIDS campaigns are making limited headway. A 2003 survey revealed one in five Chinese could not name a single way to protect themselves against the virus.

Many Asian nations can still avert potential epidemics.

Bangladesh, East Timor, Laos, Pakistan and the Philippines have low HIV prevalence. They have not been as heavily targeted by international aid organizations.

Their Genes.

Potentially, the virus is a real threat to the health and development of these countries. They have a young, growing population and a large share of the male population is at risk of contracting the disease.

The UN agencies estimated that 3.1 million people will have died worldwide from AIDS in 2004 — more than 50,000 of them in Asia. — the most in any year to date and more than in any previous year. They said nearly 40 million now have HIV, the highest total in the 23-year history of acquired immune deficiency syndrome. While countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand were hit early, others including Indonesia, Nepal, Vietnam and China are only beginning to see the disease spread rapidly and must launch efforts to stop it.

The cultural bias of genetics

Humans and apes. How similar are we really?

JONATHAN MARKS

All cultures impose on their members ideas about who they are, how they came to be, and where they fit in socially. For example, pre-modern Europe believed that a woman who became a streetwalker after marriage carries the imprint of her lover within her, so that her child born in wedlock would resemble the earlier lover rather than the husband! This served to justify the premium placed on female chastity.

Folk ideas about heredity are a particularly powerful cultural tool, but they are not unique to pre-modern societies. Even contemporary science has its own cultural ideologies about heredity, which are often difficult to disentangle from the complex data and high technology we believe produces objective, value-free glimpses of nature.

In the field of human origins, it is known that a human DNA sequence is nearly 99 percent identical to the corresponding part of a chimpanzee’s DNA. It is not uncommon to hear the conclusion that we are “nothing but” chimpanzees (and hated to be aggressive or to possess whatever attributes are being imputed to apes these days), or that apes merit human rights. Once again social meanings are entwined within beliefs about heredity.

That overwhelming similarity between human and chimpanzee DNA is actually a product of two cultural facts: our familiarity with the chimpanzee’s body and our unfamiliarity with DNA. After all, when the chimpanzee was new and interesting (in the 1700’s), contemporary scholars commonly judged it to be overwhelmingly similar to the human form — so much so, that it was commonly classified as a variant of humans.

After several centuries studying apes, we are familiar with every subtle difference in form between our species and theirs. But the emergence of molecular comparisons in the 1960s, and DNA technologies in the 1980s, presented a new way of comparing species. The comparison of linear polymers — proteins made up of chains of amino acids, or DNA made up of chains of nucleotides — held out the promise of a simple tabular approach to evolution.

When we compare the genetic material of humans and chimpanzees, we find that it is essentially our identical to nearly 99 of every 100 comparable sites. But this method omits much of what has been learned about genomic evolution in the last quarter century. Mutational processes are far more complex than was thought a few decades ago with strand slippage, duplication, transposition, and illegitimate recombination producing large-scale differences between closely related genomes.

In other words, a human and a bonobo have much in common genetically, despite their being related by a common ancestor. The degree to which two species are alike is a matter of degree, not of fundamental similarity.

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Thamel street festival

On Saturday, the streets of Thamel will come alive with music

AARTI BASNYAT

This year’s Thamel street festival is going to be bigger and better than the previous years. On Saturday, 27 November, the streets of Thamel will be pedestrianised from 12PM to 10PM and the neighbourhood will come alive with an open-air street dance festival.

Nepal’s finest DJs and International DJs from UK and India will be spinning their magic in the streets for the passers-by to dance to. This massive open-air multi-genre party aims to promote peace, love and harmony among the people through music. Thamel will be divided into two main party zones, with R&B, Hip Hop, Disco, Pop and other kinds of commercial music being played in Zone 1 while Trance, Techno and House will be played in Zone 2. The rest of Thamel, meanwhile, will host stalls set up by different restaurants and bars. The event is sponsored by McDowell’s and supported by the British Council, Wave magazine, Metro and Tuborg. This is definitely an event not to be missed.

The tradition of turning Thamel over to concerts and celebration started last November with an unprecedented musical event: Peace Project Thamel Street Dance Music Festival. PartyNepal.com and Funky Buddha Bar & Café organised Nepal’s first open-air dance event and the messages were simple: peace, harmony and a good time.

The organisers aimed to bring the nation together and eventually the world with music as a medium. The party started by 2PM and the 20,000+ crowd danced all afternoon without missing a beat. Thamel had been divided into Zone 1 and Zone 2. Zone 1 pumped out Hip Hop, R & B, Pop and House, while Drum & Bass and Psytrance poured out of Zone 2. The festival was a huge success and received wide international media coverage.

The DJ lineup this year is:

Zone 1 Tridevi Marg, Thamel: R&B, Hip-Hop, Pop, Funk and Remixes

- Aseem vs DJ SohFreak: 2PM till 4PM
- DJ Larry Blackman Junior (Dubai): 4PM till 5PM
- DJ Bee and Chloe’s Husband (UK): 5PM till 7PM
- DJ Ankit: 7PM till 9PM

Zone 2 Narisama Chok, Thamel: House, Drum and Bass, Asian massive, Psy Trance

- DJ FB Sequence: 3PM till 4PM
- DJ Bhatia: 4PM till 5PM
- DJ Mahesh: 5PM till 6PM
- DJ Zen: 6PM till 7.30 PM
- DJ Numan: 7.30 PM till 9PM

Vacancy Announcement

An INGO dedicated to democratic development is expanding its office in Kathmandu and is requesting applications for a Senior Professional Program Manager.

The ideal applicant will have:

- Complete fluency in English and Nepali, both oral and written,
- A higher degree in Political Science, Law or another relevant field,
- Ability to analyze the political situation in Nepal and help design effective programs in response,
- Leadership qualities, as well as ability to work in a group environment,
- Ability to interact with different stakeholders, line ministries and government agencies,
- Professional demeanor and ability to represent the organization publicly when necessary,
- Familiarity with MS-Office suite and internet,
- Significant experience in the politics of Nepal,
- A firm non-partisan commitment to the development of democracy in Nepal,
- Three to five years of experience with INGOs desirable,
- Nepali Citizenship.

The position is based in Kathmandu, but would entail some travel to the districts. Salary would be comparable to that offered by other INGOs in Nepal, and commensurate with experience.

Please apply with CV and short essay of no more than 500 words on how you would go about developing and strengthening democracy in Nepal.

Female applicants are especially encouraged to apply, as are members of under represented population groups. Last date for receiving application December 08, 2004.

Post Box: 8975 EPC: 4129
Restoring the august house

With only a little bit more training our honourable peoples’ representatives could soon join the Nepali martial arts contingent heading out to the Olympics. An intensive karate clinic was held recently to ready them for battle with the best MPs the world has to offer.

And so, for the first time in the history of this sports-loving nation, a session of parliament was converted for half a day into a dojo. Our MPs showed mastery of the three elements that every great karate expert needs: an instinct for speed, strength and technique. I know talent when I see it. And looking down at the floor of the august house last week, I could tell that the honourable representatives of the United Marxist-Leninists are born martial artists.

During the first round, the UML’s resident black belt made a lunge from his seat, carried out two impressive triple flip-down the aisle, and emitting a warlike cry, pirouetted in the air to land a perfectly placed knuckle punch on the solar plexus of a rather astonished honourable Nepali Congressman.

That day, the United Marxist-Leninists showed why their forebears of the Great Proletarian October Revolution rocked the world in ten days. Following Lenin’s famous advice to “take one step forward and two steps back” the honourable member from the UML then turned around quickly and placed an accurate reverse jump kick on another unsuspecting member of the ruling party, following it up quickly with a finger jab into his (the ruling party member’s) eye socket.

If they were actual blows, these karate movements could have been fatal. It is a truism to the non-violent nature of the Nepali people that punches were pulled, and tremendous restraint was shown by all concerned. True, some honourable nose cartilages got mashed, an elected groin or two needed first aid, some parliamentary earlobes were chipped. But in the spirit of this great sport, participants showed great accountability and transparency.

By room, the tournament was in full swing with the quarter-finals and semi-finals being waged in various parts of the august house. A particularly interesting bout was going on near the exit where an exasperated marshal was trying to untangle two MPs who, it seems, mistook this venue for the knockout of the World Wrestling Federation-Nepal (WWF/N) Tournament which was actually being held in the Upper House.

While the Nepali Working Peasants’ Party cheered, the UML MP had got the Nepali Congressman in a firm half-nelson. The desperate NC MP then stuck his fingers up the nostril of his opponent, briefly easing the vice-like grip. The Honorable Speaker, who was trying to play referee, himself got embroiled in hand-to-hand combat and after that it became a three-way fight, leading to an electrifying finish in which the judges pronounced the Speaker winner.

Another infighting was taking place under the Royal Sceptre between two Nepali Congressmen who had abandoned karate rules and were involved in a Thai-style kickboxing match which was now in its final round. Further up the aisle, two honorary members were practicing throwing the Treasury Benches at each other.

By the time the final bell rang, participants, spectators and media in the gallery agreed that a good time was had by all, and that martial art was an important part of defending democracy in Nepal.

If the august house was so much fun, I can’t wait for the September house.