Tigers may seem like an elusive remnant of our jungly past, but whether they continue to exist in the wild depends on a very current nexus of politics, economics and society.

Nepal and 12 other tiger range countries have declared that they will double the estimated 3200 tigers in the wild in the next 12 years. For Nepal, this means doubling our adult wild tiger population of 121.

“We understand tiger conservation is not like breeding chickens,” Forest Minister Deepak Bohara conceded in the course of being grilled by BBC Nepal on Monday. “That is exactly why we are extending tiger habitat in Banke National Park and taking a strong stance against forest encroachment, poaching and smuggling in tiger parts.” But in the face of continued poaching and encroachment, this is easier said than done.

2010 is the Year of the Tiger.

With crucial tiger summits this year in Vladivostok and Doha that will define the stance of China and India, let’s hope it turns out to be one that will pave the way for a Year of the Tiger 2022 we can truly celebrate.

BLENDING IN OR FADING OUT?
Tigers in India’s Bandhavgarh National Park, as captured by Nepali hunter-turned-conservationist Nanda Rana.

Numbers game
2011 is also Nepal Tourism Year. Will we cross the million-mark?
Looking around the country today, it is hard to recall that Nepal was once internationally recognised for its pioneering work with ecotourism and wildlife conservation. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project, the rescue of the tiger and rhino from the brink of extinction in Chitwan, the successful translocation of these species to nature reserves in western Nepal and the gharial breeding program on the Narayani were all once models. Some were replicated within Nepal and around the world.

But Nepal’s human population has doubled since the early 1980s, and political instability has taken its toll. Fickle governments have lacked the political commitment or the time horizon to invest in safeguarding past accomplishments. As well as address new threats. Whatever is happening now owes much to the momentum of past success.

The midhills have benefited from the community forestry program, an exemplar of creating sustainable livelihoods by protecting nature. But the lack of accountability during the political transition and the post-war culture of violence have eroded some of the gains as user groups collude to harvest logs for personal gain. Elsewhere, especially in the Terai, migration and population expansion are increasing the pressure on protected areas. The Maoists have been following the example set by the NC and UML in the 1990s by settling hill farmers along what remains of the Terai forests. The pressure on land is nothing new. But the single biggest danger to the future of our forests.

Which is why the government’s commitment to implement the World Bank Rafite Fund’s campaign to double the number of tigers in Nepal by 2022 is such a huge challenge. Contiguous Terai forests that served as wildlife corridors from the plains to the Mahabharat hills are being wiped away. Tiger, rhino and wild elephant populations cannot roam as they used to, living instead in isolated strips within fragmented jungle strips.

The breakdown of the state has emboled poachers and Nepal now serves as a funnel for poached Indian tigers to China, just as it does for sandalwood and other contraband.

The solution is clear: protecting habitats, restoring jungle corridors along the India-Nepal border in the Terai, and clamping down on the trade in tiger parts (see p12-13). But even these measures can be difficult in times of political volatility, and when joblessness and poverty drive desperate people to encroach and poach.

But Nepal has shown in the past that we can do it. We can once more take the lead in implementing eco- tourism models and fostering a sustainable, symbiotic relationship between people and parks.

Doubling Nepal’s present population of 111 adult tigers is an achievable goal, and saving the charismatic species at the top of the food chain will also save the ecosystems where they live.

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Eleven hours of load shedding have played havoc with the evening schedule of the Nepali middle class. Affluent television addicts have opted for massive inverters. But the rest of us have to either put up with FM banter or scan pages under candlelight.

Since prime time coincides with the heaviest power cuts, major advertisers are reluctant to pay a premium for ad spots. The trend is not yet fully visible, but a sizable section of the audience and advertisers has begun to patronise the print media.

Diesel-run generators are expensive, and the publishers compelled to use them have no reason to be grateful to Nepal Electricity Authority for a sudden jump in circulation. But newspapers and magazines will certainly need to improve on quality if they are to retain new readers who will have the option of going back to television once the power supply improves.

Where regular reporting is concerned – who did or said what – newspapers can’t compete with radio, television or the Internet. By the time the morning papers arrive, the talking heads of the evening shows will have already torn every event of any significance apart. But the priorities of print have tended to be similar to those of television: in an attempt to reach the masses, both emphasise what is urgent rather than what is important.

Papers can add value not only by covering weighty issues but also by making them more interesting. This requires a reorientation of the way print journalism is done.

The Indian newspaper industry is trying to cope with the competition by transforming itself into a clone of the flickering monitor. Even in print, a story these days has to be small enough to fit the cellphone screen, but must have sufficient pictures to hold its own around the breakfast table, where blogs and newsfeeds are competing for attention.

A more sustainable response perhaps would be to do what only print is capable of doing: present news in such a way that it remains news. Newspapers now have to learn to do magazine journalism and magazines have to adopt the techniques of literary reporting. It may not have been by design, but some Nepali publications seem to be adapting successfully.

The cover of the daily Naya Patrika is quintessentially tabloid. Sensational headlines, arresting snippets, unusual pictures and fresh angles on everyday stories make this paper sell like, well, a tabloid. But looks can also be deceptive. Naya Patrika has more in-depth stories for highbrow readers than many ordinary broadsheets. In its centrepreads, talented reporters like Sangitshrota, Pramila and Deepak dig deep into personalities and events with unmatched literary flair.

The weekend issue of Nagarik daily has its own corps of writers who combine the integrity of facts, the beauty of truth and the drama of a story in their reporting. Buddhiasagar, who also happens to be a published poet and a budding novelist, has drawn a picture of rural Kalihai so vividly every antic of Laxman Tharu suddenly begins to make sense. Tharus are peripheral to Buddhi's story, but he explains the marginalisation of Laxman’s generation in their own homeland more eloquently than any deliberately sympathetic coverage might.

Sudhir Sharma honed his storytelling techniques at some of the pioneering news magazines of Nepal before becoming the editor of Kantipur daily. His paper is too deep into the respectability groove to allow him to experiment with the so-called literature of facts. However, even the old lady of Subidhanagar recently ran a front page story describing how the palms of the bereaved Moin Shah were colder than the wet hands of the reporter. Great journalism is not only a window, but also a mirror – a reader looks at the world and sees his own reflection through every story.

Objectivity helps the media establish credibility. But a new crop of print journalists has shown that it is subjectivity in reporting that makes a story meaningful and enduring.
Money matters

**SUVAU DEV PANT**

F

ar from a short-term monetary phenomenon, the cash crunch signals deeper economic problems. Liquidity is tight largely because commercial banks lack access to ready pools of cash, having converted too many deposits into loans. The credit-to-deposit ratio is 95 per cent, nearly 20 per cent more than what is considered ideal. The quarter-on-quarter growth rate of loans is four per cent higher than that of deposits.

Only 8-10 banks are healthy, the rest have mismanaged their balance sheets,” says Nepal Rastriya Bank (NRB) Deputy Governor Krishna Bahadur Mamanath. The consequent scramble to meet liquidity requirements has sent the inter-bank lending rate soaring to 11 per cent. At one point it was 14 per cent, which is about double the normal rate. Deposit figures are low because remittance growth has dropped about 56 per cent this quarter compared to the same period last year, and a significant amount of money has left formal financial networks for informal channels (such as cooperatives) or lies unspent in newly overflowing state coffers. Depositors have also generally fled a surge in gold imports, as traders have taken to transporting gold to India via Nepal in order to capitalise on lower duties here, and investments abroad. According to Shivant Pandey of Nepal Investment Bank, “Gold imports this quarter increased by over 225 per cent compared to the same period last year. Total gold imports almost offset our total exports.”

Not all earnings from the re-export of gold to India re-enter formal channels. Authorities have struggled to replenish the money supply since the widening trade deficit has hit foreign exchange reserves hard. Authorities have responded by expanding credit and liquidity by way of repo auctions and subsidised loans to troubled banks, reinforced financial regulations, and plans to raise import duties on key items including gold. Officials predict a speedy recovery if banks shape up. “But a broader package of fiscal and monetary measures may be needed. The government will have to dig deep to shore up investor and depositor confidence in the financial system,” Pandey says. While banks must play their part, the government needs to take a more holistic approach to address the long-term economic issues or else the crunch could very well recur.”

**Short and medium-term optimist**

Sujit Mundul is the CEO and Director of Standard Chartered Nepal Ltd and spoke to Nepali Times about lessons learnt from India and the economic prospects for Nepal.

Nepali Times: Do you see any parallels with West Bengal in the old days with what you’ve seen in Nepal in the six years you’ve been here?

Sujit Mundul: My times in Nepal has shown me how transformation in a country starts and progresses, albeit slowly. I was in college in Calcutta when West Bengal as a whole was severely affected by the onslaught of the Naxalite movement: destruction and killings, ruthlessly. Nepal has similar experienced similar events, though it may not be as intense as what we went through.

Are there lessons we can learn from what Nitesh Kumar has achieved in Bihar?

Bihar is a real case study. It was synonymous with non-governance and non-performance for the last few decades but has now risen from the ashes. It’s all about Mr Nitesh Kumar’s leadership, which I think has gone above petty partisanship, but remained inclusive to usher in such fantastic all-round growth of a state that remained underserved for many years. Lesson learnt: a true leader will not bother about party line only, but will ensure holistic growth for the betterment of people and country.

Are you optimistic about the coming few years in Nepal?

I am optimistic about Nepal both in the medium and long term. Obviously there will be challenges. Adopting the right economic model and harnessing its resources (both natural and human) to ensure all-round growth is crucial. What would be the right fiscal policy at least for the next 45 years, with a critical evaluation at the end of each fiscal year? What would be the right mix of monetary policies? What would be the ideal real interest rates? How to boost domestic savings and add FDI for growth?

We have lost a lot of time, the government should encourage FDI and the private sector. A more investment-friendly labour policy (but don’t mean hire and fire) and maybe a bit of a tax sop would be conducive for the formative years of growth. The government has to not only encourage manufacturing sectors but also the service sectors, which hold enormous potential for growth in the South Asian sub-continent.

There is talk of a liquidity crunch. Better governance is needed for a sustained performance in the banking/financial sector. The skewed credit/deposit ratio of most of the banks (C/D ratios more than 90%) is cause for concern and needs correction on a long-term basis. The NRB and MoF need to fine-tune monetary policy so flow of credit to the desired growth sectors are not hampered but speculative activities are curbed for better economic management.

The liquidity crunch that the market is currently facing, in my opinion, may not be a short-term phenomenon. It will re-surface if long-term corrections are not undertaken now and might inflict serious damage on the financial system in the not-so-distant future. But I don’t think the balance of payments is a real cause for concern.
Rural Access Programme

Nepal’s Rural Access Programme (RAP), which aims to reduce rural poverty by building roads in the countryside, has won an award from the International Roads Federation. RAP is funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and has already completed 607km of roads, connected three district headquarters, and is building a further 365km. RAP will have reached one million more rural people by the time it reaches completion.

Nepal, India sign agreement

President Ram Baran Yadav, who returned from a four-day trip to India on Thursday, met Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Hyderabad House and signed a Memorandum of Understanding on four bilateral agreements concerning air services, construction of a polytechnic institute in Hetauda, a conference hall, and rail services at five points along the Nepal-India border.

US snubs Nepali garments

The US does not appear receptive to a Nepali proposal for a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) to secure preferential entry for Nepali readymade garments. US officials pointed to Nepal’s fluid political situation and lack of preparedness for TIFA negotiations. Exports of Nepali readymade garments to the US have plummeted since the Multi Fabric Agreement was scrapped in 2004.

Dynasty continues

Air Dynasty Heli Services, which has operated in Nepal since 1993, opened its branch office with 3S facility – sales, service and spares – in Itahari.

Branching out

Global Bank inaugurated its Dhulawari branch last week to provide services such as business and consumer loans, small and medium loans, Letters of Credit, bank guarantees and remittance services.

Bike away!

Morang Auto Works, the sole authorised dealer of JCB India for Nepal, opened its branch office with 3S facility – sales, service and spares - in Lahari.

Buy a share

Surya Life Insurance is providing a total of 1,080,000 shares worth Rs100 apiece. The shares are available at NMB bank.

Local lapses

If you’re wondering who your mayor is, don’t bother!

Times

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Not just numbers

For the economy, quality of tourism may be better than quantity

DEWAN RAI

The slogan for Nepal Tourism Year 2011 is "together for tourism." On the first promotional event on 26 February at Tundikhel, the government, political parties, private partners and professionals will make a public commitment to support the campaign.

Nepal Tourism Year (NTY) 2011 aims to bring in at least one million tourists by 2011 and spread the benefits of tourism to the people at large. It was announced by the Maoist-led government in 2008 as part of its rapprochement campaign.

By year, Nepal’s foreign exchange earnings as well. Though tourist arrivals are up year by year, Nepal’s foreign exchange earnings from tourism have never crossed the US$350 million threshold.

If high-end tourism were developed, Nepal could earn as much revenue from the current number of tourists as one million tourists would bring in. But if that target is to be reached at some point, Nepal has a long to-do list.

It could start with connectivity. The government has announced visa waivers for tourists visiting Nepal for the second time, and is working on online visa applications. But how tourists actually get to Nepal is moot.

Seventy per cent of visitors to Nepal enter by air. Currently, 25 international airlines operate in Nepal and three more will start operations by the end of this year. But they are all second-eachon Asian airlines catering primarily to migrant workers. After Lufthansa stopped flights to Kathmandu in 1995, for instance, German tourists fell from 44,530 in 1994 to 19,123 last year.

With Nepal Airlines continuing woes, Nepal remains less connected than its neighbours. "We have to improve land route services, and introduce homestay to complement tourist hotels," says Sapkota. "If we try, something will happen but if we don’t even try, nothing will happen."

Also truly Asia?

Speaking at the inaugural function of the PATA Adventure Travel and Responsible Tourism Conference in Kathmandu recently, the chairman of Malaysia Tourism Vicar Wee shared the success of his country’s visitor promotion campaign.

When the Asian economic crisis of 1998 caused the economy to contract by 7.4 per cent and tourism to fall, the Malaysian Truly Asia campaign was launched. Malaysia’s visitor arrivals quadrupled to 22 million in ten years. Today, Malaysia is the 11th largest tourism destination in the world and raises in $15 billion a year.

Wee had the following tips for Visit Nepal 2011:

- Increase connectivity
- Improve tourism infrastructure, cleanliness and hygiene
- Leverageumbi as a Spiritual Tourism hub with direct flights
- Improve security and political stability
- Proactive and coherent government policy
- Human resource development and providing value to customers
- Dynamic and innovative marketing

CA member and founder of Blue Diamond Society Sunil Babu Pant is also the organiser of the first LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) travel symposium in Asia. Excerpts of interview:

Nepal Times: What is the objective of the symposium?

Pant: We officially want to welcome gay and lesbian visitors, who think Nepal is conservative. This is a huge opportunity for Nepal because no one has tapped this market.

Whose are the participants?

There will be travel companies from US, Europe, Thailand and Japan. Travel businesses over there focus on this market because they spend twice as much as other tourists. The term DINK stands for Double Income No Kids. They are luxury travellers, they stay in good hotels and spend a lot of money. It’s a very lucrative market for Nepal because we have virtually no competition from our neighbours.

You have also established a travel agency, Pink Mountain Travel and Tours. It’s a travel agency like ours. We are also focused on adventure travel. One difference is that we will have guides who will also explain historical sites from the LGBT angle.

How are local businesses responding?

The response has been overwhelming. Several have asked me to endorse their travel agencies and hotels. I would be more than happy to, I just have to make sure they are gay friendly.

You invited the Prince of Jaipur Manvendra Singh, who has recently announced that he is gay, to have his wedding in Nepal. He is coming for a visit this year. He is the chief guest in the symposium. We have announced that he is going to marry his long-term partner. We are thinking of taking him to Sauraha and decorating elephants in royal style. There are several couples who have inquired about getting married in Everest Base Camp. Why not? It’s good for our economy.
Beans to brew

W

The root of the bean

The bean is like sleep. Wake up and smell the coffee. Once said, a morning without coffee is like sleep. For me, a small coffee pot idea a try. But since none were available in Langtang, I found every hotel, no matter how small or grand, was serving exactly the same instant coffee. He couldn’t help but wonder: “Why does no one serve fresh Nepali coffee?” One lodge owner wanted to give his coffee pot idea a try. But since none were available in Kathmandu, Bull imported them himself. It took him over nine months to bring in a couple of hundred coffee pots. He has a pretty good coffee available in Nepal,” Bull says. “A small coffee pot means everyone can enjoy their local coffee!...”

Nepal’s nascent coffee business is slowly but surely redefining the idea of a Nepali’s morning brew

Price-wise, the government has intervened by setting a base rate of Rs 27 per kg for fresh cherries, more than the international fair trade rate. That said, there is currently no governing body looking into and regulating the quality of coffee grown here.

As a result, companies like Plantec Nepal Estate have taken the initiative in getting their coffee certified organic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a lengthy and stringent process. P.K. Lama of Royal Everest Coffee Mill also sees the importance of obtaining proper certification for his coffee exports and is in the midst of preparing his company for a review. Such moves are positive signs for the future of the industry.

For locals who care for a taste of these Nepali brews, cafés in town like Beans Coffee offer beverages that look as good as they taste. If you fancy brewing your own (see box), you can get Top of the World Coffee delivered fresh to your doorstep. Wake up and smell the coffee! Visit nepalitimes.com for more info on Nepali coffee.

Do you appreciate the difference between a cup of ordinary and truly great coffee?

Order on-line at: www.topoftheworldcoffee.com

Nothing, absolutely nothing, beats the taste of coffee roasted & delivered fresh-to-your-door... the very next morning.

(Cash on delivery... no credit card required)

Top of the World Coffee Pvt. Ltd. P.O. Box 8975 EPC 1680. Sunakothi, Lalitpur, Nepal. Tel: 9851079387, E-mail: info@topoftheworldcoffee.com

Coffee crusade

If you’ve wanted to ditch instant coffee but found load-shedding rendered your fancy electric coffeemaker as useless as a one-armed juggler, Richard Bull is here to help...

Bull has just introduced the macchinetta, known as the cafettiera, moka pot, or simply the coffee pot, to Kathmandu. His mission: to change the way we drink coffee. “A lot of coffee served is not good,” he says. “It’s bitter, flavourless, burnt, chemical, too strong, too bitter, served in buckets, old, cold...”

While trekking in Langtang, Bull found every hotel, no matter how small or grand, was serving exactly the same instant coffee. He couldn’t help but wonder: “Why does no one serve fresh Nepali coffee?” One lodge owner wanted to give his coffee pot idea a try. But since none were available in Kathmandu, Bull imported them himself. It took him over nine months to bring in a couple of hundred coffee pots. He has a pretty good coffee available in Nepal,” Bull says. “A small coffee pot means everyone can enjoy this locally produced, internationally sought after stuff. Coffee pots are on sale at Cafe Society and Gaia Cafe. Tips on how to make good coffee at nepalitimes.com.
**EVENTS**

Pepsi ICC World Cricket League, Nepal hosts the Division 5 event from 20-27 February at the Army School, Tribhuvan University and Engineering College, http://icc-cricket.yahoo.net/

Australian Embassy Film Roadshow, a festival of contemporary Australian films such as *Chopper* (pic below) at the Russian Culture Centre, Kamalpokhari, 19 to 23 February, tickets at Rs30 available at the Australian Embassy (4371678 ex 102), Gurukul (4468956, 2101332) and at the venue, proceeds to the Tijgana Institute of Ophthalmology.

Literally Figurative - An International Art Exhibition, drawings by Kapil Mani Dixit and students of North Lake College on nudity, 17-26 February, Imago De Gallery, Nagpokhari, 4442464

Second Class Room Show 2010, botanical paintings in watercolour by amateur artists, 10.30am-6.30pm, 14-21 Feb except Saturday at Park Gallery, Pulchowk, 5523007

Cooking class with lunch, French cuisine first Saturday of each month, 9am to 2pm at Delices de France Restaurant, 4280326, info@restaurant-nepal.com

Cultural Studies Group Nepal Monthly Lecture Series, 10am, 26 Feb at the Shankar Hotel. Kunda Dixit presents the making of the *A People War* trilogy.

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30am Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.30am and meditation 5-6pm weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

**MUSIC**

House of Music presents AIF4 from 8.15pm-9.45pm and 1974AD from 10.15pm-11.30pm, 19 Feb, Rs199, 9849243807

JSC Jazz Quartet, every Sunday at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpal, 9803160719

Chillout Lounge with DJ Miriam, every Friday at the Bourbon Room, Lal Durbar Marg, 4441703

Saturday African Nite, with African food and music from 8pm at Jazzabelle Cafe, Jhamshikhel, 2114075

Robin and the New Revolution, every Tuesday 7pm on at the Bamboo Club, Thamel, 4701547

Gypsy jazz with Hari Maharjan, with royal couscous and unlimited mint tea, 25 February, Rs100++, Delices de France, Thamel, 260326 info@restaurantnepal.com

Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Sokama Forest Resort, 4451212

Music with Kutumba and Mina P at Basantapur Darbar Square, 20 Feb at 5pm

Jazz evening at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4260326

HyJazz at the Rox Bar every Friday evening and Sunday Jazz Brunch at The Terrace with live music from Inner Groove, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4489862, 4491234

Acoustic Night at Cafe Bliss, Jhamshikhel, 5pm onwards, 5529732

**LITERATURE**

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**LITERATURE**

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**LITERATURE**
DINING

Art in a cup created with Royal Everest coffee beans at Beans Coffee, Kupondole, 501713

Enjoy local brews with a book at Himalayan Java, Nepal's first specialty coffee house, Tridevi Marg, 442519

Coffee and conversation in a cosy little corner at Magic Beans at Sherpa Mall, Darbar Marg.

Lavaza Coffee and Baskin n’ Robbins, at Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 552213

Experience the Gyalok (hotpot) with T-mamos, meats and more for lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, 4412999 or at Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar, Darbar Marg, 4230890, 4239077

Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Café, for wood-fired pizza and free wi-fi Internet, 01213681

Famous stews of the world, enjoy famous stews of the world at the Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6.00PM onwards, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4495962

Strawberry High Tea, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4495962

Vegetarian Buffet, every Monday, Oriental Nights, flavours and specialities of Asia every

Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4283070

Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30pm everyday

Jazzabell Café, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8pm, Jhamikhel, 2114075

The Corner Bar, 5-7pm, 3-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 441818

Al Fresco, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Kakori, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, 7-10.45pm, Soalteen Crown Plaza, 4279899

Tepanyaki meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318

Wednesday Arabian Nights for Middle Eastern specialities every Friday, 6.30pm at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4495962

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OUT AND ABOUT: President Ram Baran Yadav inspects an honour guard at Delhi’s Presidential Palace on Tuesday during his four-day visit to India.

BROTHERS-IN-ARMS: State Restructuring Committee members (L-R) Ram Nath Dhakal (UML), Dinanath Sharma (Maoist) and Pratibha Rana (RPP) visiting Army Headquarters on Monday.

LOVE ETHERAL: A couple celebrates Valentine’s Day at 1905 Restaurant, Sunday.

TWO VIGILS: Buddhists celebrate Tibetan New Year amidst tight security in Boudha, Sunday.

TECH TRANSFER: Rotary Club of Patan hands over 80 computers and printers to nine public schools in Lalitpur.
Looking for a home

PHILIP HOLMES

Last week three Nepali boys aged 8, 9 and 10 were removed from juvenile ‘homes’ in Kolkata by a rescue team from the Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation (EBMF), working in close cooperation with the Nepalese Consulate. The two oldest boys had been detained there for four years, and the youngest, Sunji, for three years.

Sunji’s face still bears the scars of a vicious attack by a mentally disturbed juvenile who was also held at the centre. All three boys had originally run away from abusive step-parents. They found their way onto the streets of India and, through the police, into the juvenile detention centres.

The boys’ release coincided with calls from organisations such as UNICEF and Terre des Hommes to suspend, once again, inter-country adoptions from Nepal.

The nightmare scenario now is that the call for a blanket suspension of inter-country adoption may be heeded, and followed by another prolonged period of indecision. But reforms could be introduced very easily.

The ridiculously high financial return to the government, agencies and orphanages from inter-country adoption should be reduced. Difficult cases should be investigated thoroughly. But clear cut cases such as those of unwanted step-children should be fast-tracked for domestic solutions. Nepal’s Cinderella Children should be protected by preserving what I believe to be its State’s responsibility to prioritize the best interests of children. The nightmare scenario now is that the call for a blanket suspension of inter-country adoption may be heeded, and followed by another prolonged period of indecision. But reforms could be introduced very easily.

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Across China, tiger merchandise is all the rage at the start of the Year of the Tiger. In India, celebrities are involved in campaigns to save the real tiger. Yet there are still many Chinese who would rather eat bits and pieces of a tiger than save the great cat in the wild. And there are still many Indians who do not see why it is necessary to save the tiger.

Estimates put the number of tigers in the wild across 13 Asian countries at around 3,200, down from 5,000-7,000 in the last Year of the Tiger in 1998. India has 1,400 wild tigers left, and 23 were killed by poachers in 2009. Nepal has 121 adult wild tigers but has lost at least 28 in the last five years to poaching.

Many tigers are in small populations in remnant patches of habitat, are constantly under threat and short of prey. Poachers kill not only the tigers for their bones, organs and skin, but also their prey (deer and wild boar) for meat.

Small populations are also
CITES conference in Doha in April. The farms claim that opening up the trade will flood the market with tiger parts, lowering prices and removing the incentive for poaching wild tigers. But it costs up to $4,000 a year to rear a tiger in captivity, and less than $25 to have one killed in the wild. Everywhere in the world, traders and smugglers exploit the smallest price differentials. Consumers will also prefer wild tigers to farmed cats, creating a black market.

At a meeting in Hua Hin in Thailand last month, officials from 13 Asian tiger range countries pledged to double the number of tigers in the wild by 2022, the next Year of the Tiger. Studies in India and Thailand suggest this is achievable, but the challenge is to restore broken jungle corridors linking habitats. The WWF and the World Bank (which, thanks to its president Robert Zoellick is a recent convert to tiger conservation) are planning a Tiger Summit in Vladivostok in September. It will be chaired by Zoellick and Russian Premier Vladimir Putin.

Will the real tiger survive until the next year of the tiger in 2022?

Hua Hin warned of trouble ahead. A World Bank statement saying China’s tiger farms should be shut down irritated the Chinese. And India snubbed the World Bank, sending a junior official. Granted, the World Bank saving tigers is a hard sell in India, where its track record shows wildlife habitat has always been “acceptable collateral damage”, in the words of Mumbai-based conservationist Bittu Sahgal, editor of Sanctuary magazine. Separately last month, India said it would release over $200 million to relocate communities from tiger habitats. In recent years tigers have completely disappeared from at least two sanctuaries in India, and may be on the way out in about half a dozen more. Whether the tiger’s call in the wild will still be heard 12 years from now, or if today’s children will grow up to see the great cats only in cages, can be decided only by local protection and enforcement in its last few viable habitats.

Nirmal Ghosh is a conservationist and senior foreign correspondent for The Straits Times. He is also a Trustee of conservation NGO The Corbett Foundation.

Full version of this article at www.nepalitimes.com

Nepàl School of Social Sciences and Humanities

The Graduate Diploma in Social Sciences programme aims at giving students a strong theoretical and analytical foundation that can be applied either in their professional career or subsequent enrolment in university programmes in the social sciences.

Eligiblity: Minimum Bachelor’s degree with a first or higher second division in any discipline from a recognised university, and a reasonably good command of the English language.

The programme admits only full-time students.

Classes begin on Monday, 12 April, 2010.

Detailed information and instructions for application can be obtained from www.nepaschool.edu.np or the Nepa School of Social Sciences and Humanities office, ciSo Social Science Bana, Ramchandra Marg, Battisputali, Kathmandu (14/4/2907).

Completed applications have to reach the Nepa School office by 4:30 pm, Friday, 5 March, 2010.

Nepal School is holding an Open House on its academic programme from 1 to 5 pm on 21 February, 2010 (Sunday) at Yeti Nova Kendra, Patan Dhotra, Lalitpur (5533767). Formal presentations will be made at 1, 2.30 and 4.30. All are welcome.

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Genetically vulnerable. There are only a few areas which, if protected and ideally also restored, could support more tigers. These include Thailand’s 17,870 sq km western forest complex, overlapping Burma’s Tenasserim region. Northern India’s Terai Arc landscape, shared with Nepal, is historically the most productive breeding ground for tigers. But both the Indo-Nepal and Thai-Burma landscapes have habitat breaks that need to be restored to link subpopulations.

The most basic requirement remains that of protecting tigers, and on the demand side, China’s role is critical. Despite studies showing tiger bones and organs are no different to those of dogs, pigs and goats, there is still demand. Wild tigers regularly turn up in Thailand seven in half and stuffed into the boots of cars carrying them up the Malay peninsula to China. Once chopped up and passed up the line, the sum of a tiger’s parts can fetch up to US$70,000.

China, backed by owners of tiger farms with over 6,000 of the big cats in stock alive or dead in deep freezers, has been trying to get the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to agree to opening up the market for farmed tigers. A proposal to this effect is reportedly ready for the next CITES conference in Doha in April.

The farms claim that opening up the trade will flood the market with tiger parts, lowering prices and removing the incentive for poaching wild tigers. But it costs up to $4,000 a year to rear a tiger in captivity, and less than $25 to have one killed in the wild. Everywhere in the world, traders and smugglers exploit the smallest price differentials. Consumers will also prefer wild tigers to farmed cats, creating a black market.

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Inverter import ban ill-considered

Editorial, Abhiyan, February 15-21, 2010

The government has banned the import of inverters, effective last Wednesday. It has reasoned that the inverters, which charge batteries so power is available during load-shedding hours, are inefficient and are exacerbating load-shedding. The Energy Ministry also intends to discourage the use of inverters by implementing the ban on importing inverters. The Nepal Electricity Authority also claims that if inverters were totally banned, load-shedding could be reduced by two hours daily.

In the last three years, 30 brands of inverters have been imported into the Nepali market. The inverter business is worth about Rs 500 million a year. Prices range from Rs 4000 to the hundreds of thousands. Though on the surface the ban on inverters appears to be positive, it only reveals the short-sightedness of those who allowed the growing use of inverters all these years. It’s not as if Nepal’s power shortfall, and the accompanying load-shedding, is anything new.

The government’s decision has meant that the price of some imported inverters has shot up; this will only encourage the black market, which will thrive across the open border with India and the black market across the Nepal-China border at Tatopani. Smugglers will benefit – Nepal customers will suffer.

An energy use policy is imperative that takes into account the minimum necessities of citizens, such as the use of a couple of CFL bulbs. Solar energy should be encouraged, and the ‘solar plan’ aimed at rural and urban residents should be further developed and made attractive to customers. It is also key to plug the leakage of up to 30 per cent from the national electricity grid, find ways to link small power producers to the grid, and make arrangements with neighbouring countries to boost supply.
The committee on system of governance failed to present an ‘ideal’ governance system. Were’t the models floated in the committee any good?

Krishna Khanal: The committee failed to propose a single model even after voting on the main proposal and those of the dissenters. There are clearly three models for a governance system. The Maoists’ model of the presidential system got 18 votes but failed to garner a majority. The UML/NC proposal for an executive prime minister elected through parliament got 14 votes, while TMLP’s proposal for an elected president through parliament got three votes.

For those who truly believe in democracy, the governance model is not as important as the principles involved. First, there should be an elected government. The biggest party should lead the government. Second, the government should be accountable and capable of governing and delivering services to the public. They should not be in power forever once they get elected. There should be periodic elections: usually 3-6 years in democratic countries.

The executive president as proposed by the Maoists would also be elected through periodic elections. We can make a provision to ensure such a president would only be eligible to serve two terms. The reformed model proposed by UML and NC is the Westminster model of parliament, which is a popular model. An added provision in this model is that a no-confidence motion shall not be tabled twice in the same parliamentary session. The 1990 constitution also had this provision but it did not work, as parties resorted to special sessions of parliament to table such motions.

Although TMLP’s proposed model is similar to the Westminster model, it has an executive president instead of a prime minister, as is the case in certain African countries, where parliament elects the president.

Therefore, all these models are democratic models. An elected government through periodic elections and an accountable and capable government to ensure good governance is what people want.

Why isn’t there a consensus if all models are in line with democratic norms? A lack of expert advice?

Lack of inter-party dialogue and rigid party stances prevented a consensus. The discussion on the proposals was not sufficient and the other democratic models were not even discussed.

There was expert advice but the political leaders didn’t make use of it. For instance, why did UML suddenly abandon its official proposal and support the NC proposal? TMLP did not support a directly elected executive, as that would not benefit small parties. Since the Maoists won the last election, they opted for a directly elected executive. However, we have to look at this proposal in its totality. It is important to know what kind of legislative, judiciary and executive they have proposed. One can see that the Maoists’ proposal leaves open the possibility of a totalitarian leadership. For instance, they have proposed a unicameral parliament while they advocate a federal system. Their system lacks checks and balances for legislative bodies. Besides, they have also demanded supremacy of parliament. They have even recommended control via a parliamentary special committee of other organs of the state. The Panchayat regime had this structure. The Maoists’ model on the form of state governance is questionable for this reason.

Which of these models is most suitable for us?

All three models proposed are based on a first past the post system. The Maoists and TMLP have different opinions on the election of an executive president. NC and UML are parliamentarians traditionally. Although the parliamentary system is unstable, the government is more accountable to the public. The executive presidential system is stable but not as accountable. The British saw the monarchy as a symbol of continuity and they chose the parliamentary system to make government more accountable. The Americans wanted stability and opted for a presidential model, as there was nothing that could bring them all together.

The monarch is now gone. Though we never took him as a symbol of unity, we do need stability. That is why the president should represent diversity, not continuity, and we should have a directly elected executive prime minister. In the past, we never got a stable government even if a party got majority. Given the nature of our parties, a directly elected PM could mean more stability.

Why do you think the Westminster model didn’t work in Nepal? Because we lacked the necessary political culture. This model is characterized by government and opposition in parliament. The party in the minority leads the government and other parties make up the opposition, also called the government in anticipation. They wait until the people vote them into power, whether that takes 10, 20 or 50 years. In 15 years of parliamentary practice, our political parties did not exhibit the necessary patience to play the opposition. NC, which supported this system, didn’t even stay out of government for six months at a time. The opposition has the right to criticise the works of the government. In parliamentary culture, they play a productive role outside of government, and there needn’t be requests for a national unity government. We need to revise the form of state governance in light of our political culture. This is the job of political parties and intellectuals.

Could a directly elected prime minister fulfill our needs?

A directly elected executive prime minister might be new to many of us. The checks and balances system will be weak in the presidential system but in a directly elected prime ministerial system there will be a set of control mechanisms. There are two reasons for Nepal to go for such a prime ministerial system. First, the country’s diversity should be reflected at the highest government levels. For that, federal and provincial parliaments can elect the president, who can exercise limited power. Second, if the popularly elected prime minister exceeds his authority, the president can correct him.

What form of state governance would you recommend?

A directly elected executive PM is not a bad option. As the country has become a federal republic, it is realistic to have an executive elected directly by the people. It does not matter which system: prime ministerial or presidential, but the executive should be directly elected by the people. However, the presidential system should be different from the Maoist proposal, which doesn’t maintain an appropriate balance of powers. The conventional parliamentary system won’t work now. Therefore, a directly elected executive prime minister and a president elected by the federal and provincial parliaments will be the most appropriate model.
one of you who watched on tv the Suzie Jost vs Moonlight Lohani squabble in the Public Accounts Committee in parliament the other day now has any reason to complain about our politics. This was audiovisual entertainment at its very best.

"Am I your secretary? Am I your PA," thundered Lohani. The reference was to SuzyQ’s assistant, who has admitted to selling Nepali passports to Afghans. Now that parliament has got into the act you can bet your left arse that we are not going to have MRPs by the ICAO April deadline.

Every political party in this country is split between a disgruntled faction and a gruntled faction, so it is now going to be even more difficult to resolve the political deadlock. You may, for example, get the Baddies and the Kangries to make the peace pipe, but the very next day the gruntled faction in the NC is going to practice wushu on the GP & Dotter faction, or vice versa. The Old Fox, it is now apparent, is harassing the UML-led govt so he can get the Baddies to get him to power. But it’s not true Girja wants the prime minister’s chair. He actually wants the prime minister’s bed.

When the king went off on state visits in a royal cavalcade the whole city used to grind to a halt, and it used to be a national holiday. We hear the cabinet (for old time’s sake) nearly passed an edict to declare the president’s departure date a holiday and order a 18-gun salute, but Shit Ali Nibas vetoed the idea. Radio Nepal has restarted the Panchayati tradition of informing listeners in its morning news bulletins that PM Nepal has felicitated the King of Tonga on his auspicious birthday.

The parallels with Animal Farm are getting a bit uncanny. The whiff of Farmer Jones is strongest with Chairman Awesomeness who has gone from atheist to agnostic to a full-blown fundo. First, he visits jyotisis in Sunsari who put the fear of god into him by warning him that his Saturn is totally off whack. To placate the planets, they advised him to worship a she-water buffalo, which he promptly does. Quizzed about this by local reporters, Fearsome’s soundbite is our quote of the week: “I have discovered that astrology is very scientific. This country needs a fusion of spiritualism and materialism.”

Nepal’s leaders have always fallen over themselves to seek the blessings of Indian godmen. Which is why Prez Ram Baran helicoptered to Haridwar to touch the feet of Pilot Baba. And when Chandra Swami came to Kathmandu for Shivaratri, it wasn’t surprising that the ex-king, ex-PMs and the current PM all trooped off to the Everest Hotel to have their futures foretold. What was a little surprising was that he confessed to Chandra Swami: “Baba, it was a mistake to declare Nepal a secular state, and we haven’t done enough homework on federalism.” Now he tells us.