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EXCLUSIVE

Dor Bahadur is alive!

Dor Bahadur Bista, the famous and controversial Nepali anthropologist and activist, disappeared without trace from Jumla five years ago. His family and friends had given up hope. There were rumours he had been killed by people angry with his work among the poor.

Three weeks ago word came of a sighting of Dor Bahadur in Hardwar, India, by a Nepali pilgrim who later recognised him from a magazine picture. His family sent a search party to ashrams in India, but couldn't trace him. But they are hopeful Dor Bahadur is well. Says his son, former MP Keshar Bahadur Bista, "We will be glad if Bua is healthy, happy and at peace."

Dor Bahadur's famous book *Fatalism and Development* has gone into several editions after its first publication in 1991. Most regard it as an ethno-cultural study of the impediments to Nepal's development.....Page 5

The moment for Kodak

Kodak is giving Nepal one last chance. The US$ 6 million US-India joint venture in Nepal may decide to pack up and leave in a few weeks if it fails to get permission to export its products to India after the visit of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala next week.

"We've been assured the issue will be raised during the visit," Kodak sources told the Times. "But indications in India are not so good."

Kodak Nepal built a factory in Hetauda only to be later told that it would not be able to export to India, since the latter says Kodak's process—of importing jumbo rolls and converting them into smaller units—is not "manufacturing".

Technically the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) issues a Certificate of Origin to Nepali products seeking to export to India under the 1996 preferential treaty. But it is waiting for "tacit approval" from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

A senior Nepali official said that the government may not press hard to get India's nod for Kodak, fearing a strike back on other exports. "We should not have licensed the company in the first place," the official said. "But at that time even Indian officials supported it."

Eastman Kodak Company of the US owns 80 percent of the company in Nepal. The rest is held by Kodak India, in which Eastman Kodak controls 74 percent. Said the Kodak source: "We cannot wait for certification for ever."

Girija on Necon

The pri me minister's planned return to Nepal on board the inaugural Royal Nepal Airlines flight from Bangalore on 4 August has been scrapped because there is no flight that day.

It is not known who overlooked the days the airline is going to fly Kathmandu-Bangalore, but red-faced officials now say the prime minister will take another Nepali airline: Necon Air from Varanasi.

WATCH YOUR WALLETS!

The taxman is after your money, and he'll get it even after you die.

BINOD BHATTARAI

They say taxes and death are both inevitable. Now, if the tax office has its way you will have to clear all your tax dues before dying. And the property you bequeath to your children will be taxed at market value.

A draft Tax Act being prepared says: "Where an individual disposes of an asset on death by way of transfer of ownership of the asset to another person, the individual is treated as deriving in respect of the disposal an amount equal to the market value of the asset at the time of disposal; and the person who acquires ownership of the asset is treated as incurring in the acquisition costs of an equal amount."

In plain English, this means any inheritance will be deemed a sale and taxed at the prevailing rates for real estate at the time an individual moves on to the afterlife. Such taxes exist in other countries, too, but only where there is a proper tax culture and there are other safety nets and welfare schemes like housing support.

In death and in life, the taxman is going after the Nepali's wallet. Just about every sphere of activity may now fall under the purview of internal revenue: you'll pay tax not only on wages, salaries, leave pay, overtime pay, fees, commissions, prizes and gifts but also the money you get to buy a *khasi* for Dasain.

There is more: the tax official wants to take a chunk out of any personal allowance, including the cost of living, subsistence, rent, entertainment and transportation. The government will tax your money upon retirement. The taxman is even targeting your redundancy payments, gratuity and other benefits you may get on being fired.

Less then one percent of Nepalis pays income tax, and the government says there is no other way to increase internal revenue without spreading the tax net. It also says the new act would repeal 17 existing laws, simplify procedures and make collection more comprehensive.

Donor money has been spent to prepare this draft, including work done by a Harvard professor and an IMF consultant. It therefore reflects the language and values of a Western country.

Critics of the draft say that inheritance tax will not work in countries like Nepal where people are not even paying normal income tax. Besides, because people's entire life savings go into building a house for posterity, and there is no government social welfare support, an inheritance tax is unimplementable.

The Nepali translation of the draft is unreadable, but is being prepared for submission to Parliament. The English original is a 109-page document with 132 Articles and annexes. It is twice as big as the Income Tax Act 1974, and is doubly difficult to understand.

"The fundamental problem here is that the draft is driven purely by revenue augmentation concerns, and not by savings," says T.R. Upadhya of the international consultants group KPMG Barnets in Kathmandu.

The Federation of Nepal Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI) has come up with a 21-page list of comments on the draft bill and has stiffly criticised provisions such as the capital gains tax, accounting principles and the discretionary powers the law still gives tax officials. FNCCI also asks if Nepali businesses find the new tax regime so intimidating, what will foreign investors make of it? "At this rate, you can kiss foreign investment goodbye," said one Kathmandu-based joint venture specialist.

Most controversial are the clauses relating to capital gains which define disposal of assets as: "...when the person parts with ownership including when the asset is distributed by the owner of the asset, merged with another asset or liability, leased to another person under a finance lease, cancelled, redeemed, destroyed, lost, expired, or surrendered."

"Inheritance is something we have had for generations, but the new draft treats it as a capital gain," says Sudarshan Raj Panday, general secretary of the Association of Chartered Accountants.

"This tax draft is just take, take and take," says Prabhuram Bhandari, another CA.

It is not just the taxpayer who is confused. Even tax officials privately admit that they would need special training for "at least six months" before they can actually understand and implement the tax.

The government's says the new tax will reduce the discretionary power of officials. But phrases such as "reasonable excuse" (Art. 120, 1 (C)) leave loopholes for subjective interpretation.

Another clause under Compounding Offences (Art 129, 3 (C)) says the decision of the tax department "is final and not subject to appeal," which some say is against the Constitution itself. ♦

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NEPALI Times

News that matters to people who matter.

NEPALI Times
NEPAL'S TOP NEWSPAPER

MORE TAX, LESS INCOME

The whole point about taxes is to raise revenue for a regulatory hands-off government to function, to finance social welfare for the neediest and to carry out other national-level functions. The idea is not to tax everything that moves. It is not to try and squeeze every paisa from citizens so that they have no incentive to earn and save.

But that is exactly what the government seems to want to do with a proposed new tax law. It harks back to King John in medieval England who drove his country to penury because he got his taxman, the Sheriff of Nottingham, to collect every last penny from every peasant. Outraged citizens couldn't stand it anymore and joined a band of guerrillas in Sherwood Forest under the command of that prototype Maoist, Subcommandante Robin Hood.

Some provisions of a draft that may one day become our income tax law go beyond salaries and wages to even lay its hands on the property parents leave behind for their children—treating inheritance like a sales transaction. If someone steals your car radio, you may now be taxed, since it will also be regarded as a sale.

From business it would take a cut of the income earned from everything, plus the net gains from the disposal of a person's business assets or liabilities. Investors will pay taxes on dividends, interest, natural resource payment, rent, royalty, gain from investment insurance and so on. The taxman cometh, and he wanteth everything.

The idea behind this new draft is to widen the tax net and make it easier and more transparent for those who pay it. That is not a bad goal. As World Bank economist Joseph Stiglitz says in his column (on page 8 of this issue) countries like Nepal must simplify tax laws with single-rate, broad-based taxes to improve collection and reduce corruption.

As things stand, this draft law is so complicated that even the tax department admits it will need six months of training simply to understand its provisions. Imagine what the law will mean to the hundreds of thousands of taxpayers scattered all over Nepal.

How could something so important have been messed up so badly when all the underlying premises are right on target? Was it because a foreign consultant drafted it for us without having the least idea of local conditions? Or could it be a deeply-ingrained revenue-driven government ethos?

It is simple economics: countries can earn more from taxes only if more citizens earn more. People can earn more by working harder and for longer hours, and they will do that if there are more incentives to work harder. If you take away most of what they earn, they will not earn and they will not save. In its present avatar, the draft law will turn Nepalis into a nation of tax evaders like Pakistan (see page 13).

There is one last hope: Parliament. When the draft tax act comes up for debate, the people's representatives should retain its good points and trash the unworkable ones.

STORM IN A TEACUP

So this B-grade Kollywood personality wanted permission to shoot the prime minister. And not with a camera. Because of that one remark he made, Mohan Niraula is suddenly a star.

Dhirendra Shah, youngest brother of the King, heard the outbursts. Discretion being the better part of valour, the ex-prince chose to keep mum. Perhaps it was his silence, rather than the words spoken by others, that was the real cause of the uproar that followed. It all ended with Dhirendra being once more persuaded to leave the country.

But you should have heard the Valley's bush-telegraph hum with the rumour that a Fiji-type coup was imminent. It was all very reminiscent of Panchayat times. In mobiles across the capital, names were being dropped about the composition of a new interim cabinet.

It is easy in Nepali to end a sentence with a "re". The "re" makes any unsubstantiated rumour, however outlandish, seem plausible.

Just so as not to take any chances with rumours, our law-makers suddenly woke up, and in a show of unprecedented unity spoke in one voice against the common enemies of democracy and the constitution. The parliament did succeed in making a powerful point: you don't know what you have until you've lost it—and that goes for democracy and freedom.

What this storm in a teacup showed is that eternal vigilance is the price of democracy. It is a necessity even when the threat appears to be as innocuous as the outburst of a celluloid persona. Mohan Niraula has been sighted in Putali Sadak, "re". ♦

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SUBHAS RAI

STATE OF THE STATE

by C.K. Lal

Why Nepalis love to hate India

Nepal's age-old ties with India are just that: aged, old and fraying at the seams.

Politicians like to repeat that the love-hate relationship between Nepal and India is "age-old", and has stood the test of time. May be so. But this is selective use of history to prove a point.

It is clear from his Divyopdesh (Divine Sayings) that Nepal's great unifier king, Prithvi Narayan Shah, didn't quite trust the big neighbour to the south. Later, Jung Bahadur Rana marched into Lucknow in 1857 to quell what the British called the Sepoy Mutiny, and what the Indians claim is their First War of Independence.

The Lucknow Loot that followed permanently alienated the North Indian elite from Nepalis. Nepalis were planted in the historical memory of enlightened Indians as stooges of the British. It didn't help matters much when Gurkhas of General Dwyer fired upon innocent civilians at Jalianwala Bagh, an event that traumatised the Indian psyche.

Whatever the much-vaunted people-to-people relations, most Nepali students studying in India will tell you that plainsmen consider themselves too civilised to treat people from the hills with respect. Nepalis, for their part, looked down upon Indians with the characteristic disdain that highlanders have for the people of the plains.

At the level of the nation state, Nepal has a litany of injustices it has suffered from high-handed Indians. Nepalis think they got a raw deal in the treaty of 1950 when an oligarch under pressure was tricked into surrendering before a bigger, smarter and more powerful neighbour.

Sir C.P.N. Sinha was the Indian Ambassador in Kathmandu during the transition from Rana rule to that by the king. A zamindar from Bihar, he all but treated Nepal as an extension of his jagir and ended up antagonising a whole generation of Nepali politicians.

There is a strong impression in Nepali minds that they have got the short end of the stick in almost every border river project—from Kosi and Gandaki in the past to Pancheshwar in recent times. All Himalayan rivers originating in Nepal drain into the Ganges. When Indians try to tame some of these rivers, the trouble is transferred upstream, and submergence takes place in Nepali territory, the Laxmanpur Barrage being the most recent example.

Rulers during the Panchayat years had a vested interest in whipping up anti-India feelings: nearly all the leaders of democratic movement had lived in self-exile in India. They were labeled "anti-national elements". India steadfastly refused to consider King Birendra's proposal that Nepal be declared a 'Zone of Peace'.

In March 1989, India did not extend landlocked Nepal's trade and transit treaties. Subsequently, Nepal faced an "economic blockade" when all but two border transit points with India were closed. After enduring more than a year of extreme hardship Nepalis learnt a bitter lesson: the rest of the world wouldn't come to their aid when they were bullied by India. The blockade inadvertently hastened the restoration of democracy, but it did not make India-Nepal relations any less rocky.

Fast-forward to the present. After the motivated leak of the so-called "Nepal Gameplan" last month, the atmosphere is just not right for any substantial talks between leaders of the two countries. Shorn of diplomatese, the 'leak' was a nasty display of traditional Indian bluster. When he flies to Delhi next week, Prime Minister Girija Koirala will be stepping into the lion's den. That is saying a lot for the capital of a country that has been almost a second home for Nepali leaders of his generation.

Actually the 'age-old ties' are just that: aged, old and fraying at the seams. It's always difficult for neighbours of unequal size to be close friends. The best that they can hope for is to remain friendly. At least Koirala is realistic, admitting that he has no high hopes from his Indian "pilgrimage".

Nepal and India share the common challenge of development. They need to work more closely together. But first they must leave behind the baggage of history and learn to look towards the future. Emotions have led us to the brink of an abyss in the past. Perhaps it is time to be rational and pragmatic towards a change.

It's never too late to turn a new leaf with India. We should try to create history, not keep on repeating it. ♦

DOR BAHADUR is ALIVE

"You can always be injured if you are fighting for justice and truth. I am willing to be hurt."

Dor Bahadur Bista, speaking in 1995 at the launch of the Nepali-language periodical *Himal*, in what turned out to be his last public speech.

BIKRAM RAI

SALIL SUBEDI

Dor Bahadur Bista, Nepal's best-known anthropologist, social scientist and activist, disappeared suddenly and without trace a little over five years ago while working on a development project in the remote western hill district of Jumla. The mystery of Dor Bahadur's disappearance deepened with rumours that he had been killed by high-caste villagers who opposed his radical consciousness-raising among the poor. Even his family had given up hope.

Then, three weeks ago, word came that a Nepali pilgrim, Jitendra Bahadur Karki, had come across an elderly Nepali in Hardwar in India two years earlier. On his return to Kathmandu, Karki had forgotten about the encounter until, while flipping through some magazines, he came across a picture of a man resembling the person he had seen in Hardwar. It was Dor Bahadur Bista.

"When I met him in Hardwar I had no idea that it was Dor Bahadur Bista. He asked me about my background, about where I lived and other general questions," recalls Karki, who lives in Jawalakhel. "He told me he was from Godavari and had been staying in Hardwar for some time. He told me his last name was Giri."

It was not until three weeks ago that Karki discovered that Dor Bahadur's family didn't even know whether he was alive or not. When he told them he had seen Dor Bahadur in Hardwar, says Karki, "They looked at me in total disbelief."

Now that there has been a probable sighting, the family is suddenly hopeful again. Says one family member: "Though we haven't seen him, by Karkiji's account there are chances that Bua is alive among the hundreds of jogis in Hardwar."

The family sent a search party to India with his photographs and with the help of the embassy in Delhi searched all the ashrams around Hardwar. Karki is convinced the man was Dor Bahadur because of the distinctive mole below his right eye and also because of the questions he asked.

Says Karki: "That was how I remembered him. But then I thought, why interfere in a family matter. They would know where he is so I didn't say anything to them all this time."

Dor Bahadur's family is now convinced that he is alive and roaming the holy spots of India like a *sanyasi*. "What matters is that he is in good health, happy. And yes, we desperately want to see him again, but we don't want to disturb his peace. We don't want the police to track him down," said one tearful family member.

Dor Bahadur's work started in the 1950s when he collaborated with the Austrian anthropologist Christof von Fürer-Haimendorf on a sociological and anthropological study of Nepal. The result was his seminal work, *People of Nepal* (1964).

"Dor Bahadurji's importance to Nepali society lies in the works he has produced," says Chaitanya Mishra, sociologist and one of the founding members of the Sociology Department at the Tribhuvan University.

"He was basically a field researcher and had developed his own way of perceiving things and interpreting them. He travelled a lot, and understood Nepal's ethnographic canvas very well," says Mishra.

Dor Bahadur's career can be divided into several phases: during the 60s he collected information on ethnicity, in the 80s he interpreted that Nepali society was being mainstreamed into a monoculture, in the 90s he interpreted the value conflict and how the different communities were mutually compatible with each other.

Sudhindra Sharma, sociologist and a student of Dor Bahadur's, remembers his guru's intense arguments about issues concerning the dominance of a value-system he called the culture of fatalism. "Sometimes he would get offended in class as the issues he raised were not acceptable to conservative students," he recalls. "His arguments opened up an important discourse on why Nepal has remained backward. It made people think a lot on what had gone wrong."

Dor Bahadur's *Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle for Modernisation* mired him in controversy. His thesis in the book is that there are two value systems in Nepal—one indigenous and the other imported. Bista's argument is that the culture of fatalism, which he calls *'bahunbad'*, was imported and in the course of history gained an upper hand in society. According to Bista, Nepal is backward because the culture of fatalism devalued the country's productivity.

Says Sharma: "By calling fatalism *bahunbad*, Bista associated the concept with Bahun ethnicity which subsequently led to heated debates." The debate got even more polarised because the publication of the book coincided with the appearance of ethno-politics in the post-1990 era of democracy.

Dor Bahadur was involved in social activism in the Chaudhabisa area of Jumla district before he disappeared. He had helped construct two small hydropower projects, a school building and had begun employment training programmes with the Karnali Youth Club.

The Karnali Institute he established in Jumla in 1992 has now stopped operating. Chandra Prakash Devkota, a student from Jumla, says: "One weak point of Dor Bahadurji was that nobody was trained to look after the institute in his absence."

Dor Bahadur's son is Keshar Bahadur Bista, former MP from Lalitpur, says his father was always a "loner and a roamer and an undeclared yogi".

"If my father were alive and living the life of a jogi, I would be so relieved. Because the atmosphere in the ashrams is so contemplative, it is the ultimate place for a man who has wandered long distances struggling and fighting against the ills of society to take a deep breath and relax in." ♦

"In Nepal, people know that there is work which has to be done but they also know that this means low status. Anyone who does not have to work but can ask others to work for them is higher in status than those who work when asked by people at higher levels. Anyone who is educated, and thereby in a position to identify with the traditional role of the high caste, would never want to work. A great majority of the educated people do not work themselves but expect that others will do what needs to be done by them. When the bulk of the educated share this perspective, little work actually gets done...Everybody ends up being critical of everybody else, but does not necessarily feel guilty for not fulfilling his own formal duties. Lack of personal responsibility for work is excused by the belief that it is the supreme god who finishes all incompleted work in any case."

- p. 81, Fatalism and Development, Orient Longman (1991)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MANY TIMES

Every word in Nepali Times is a breath of fresh air! It just drips with excellence, in subject matter, investigative journalism, eye-appeal, English writing, humour, insight...

I really appreciate your taking up the defence of Novel Kishore Rai. Too often the media allow allegations to hang out there without comment long after they've proved false, and good people get hurt in the process. You took the high road.

I do hear the concerns of your readers who say Nepali Times is expensive. After all, it's the price of tea and momos in a sidewalk cafe. In my 11 years in Nepal I am distressed by the get it cheaper syndrome, which leads sadly to mediocrity, or worse. You get what you pay for, more and more people are recognising that quality costs less in the long run. Democracy demands a quality press. Maybe it's even worth a few cups of tea.

Mac Odell
Kathmandu

I read the article about Dr Novel Kishore Rai's bad experience with his credit card (Nepali Times #1). Nobody in Germany will believe that he or his wife misused a card. We esteem Dr Rai and there is absolutely no doubt about his integrity. He is sorely missed in Germany. Dr Rai can be sure he has "personal credit" for a lifetime in Germany.

Ludwig Debuck
Kathmandu

You have reported that Ms Niru Shrestha was Miss Nepal 1998 in the article tided "Model Pilot" (Demo issue) in http://www.nepalnews.com.np/contents/nepalitimes/news2.htm#11.

But, she appears to be only a 1st runner-up according to: http://www.nepalonline.net/cybernepal/missnepal/awards'98.htm

Prasanna Lal Amatya
Canada

(Niru Shrestha was first runner up until Miss Nepal 1998 was de-crowned for not returning to Nepal. -Ed)

I have just gone through your number one issue. It is of international standard, something we'd been waiting for a long time here. We hope you will maintain your quality. Services like Grindlays Dal Bhat Index were to the point and very useful for comparison.

Kumud Kumar Sharma
Kathmandu

No more slaughter of the syntax, no more grammatical gouging or terrible typos. I am glad and relieved to see that finally we do have a publication of quality. Mind you, there could be improvements but at least we don't have to suffer through the repetitious scribblings of "this scribe's" muddled musings in the dailies.

Tashi
Bellevue, Washington

I am writing to express my sincerest gratitude and my best wishes for coming out with a newspaper worthy of a deeper scrutiny than a mere glance at the headlines. I have read all the articles available on line with the utmost interest and enjoyment. I am looking forward to your first issue with great anticipation for more insightful articles.

Kanchan Adhikary
Cleveland, Ohio

I read the inaugural issue of the much-hyped 'Nepali Times'. Your first editorial was more dedicated to self-praise rather than outlining your views on burning issues confronting the nation. You even tried to justify your act by quoting Arthur Miller. There is nothing wrong in having pride in one's stature but it would have sounded sweeter, had you left it for your reader. Wishing you all the best.

Narayan Parajuli
Damak

I got to chance to see your paper on the Internet from Singapore. I like it very much. It is the only Nepali English paper with good quality, and all my Nepali friends here are hooked. Just keep it up.

Dinesh Thapa (Joy)
Singapore

PM does not trust me: Deuba

Himalaya Times, 23 July 2000
Former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba says he has not yet received any official letter delegating him with power to negotiate with the Maoists.

"Until now I have not received a letter granting me that authority although the prime minister has been saying that it has been given to me," said Deuba. "I have begun talking to them (the Maoists) on the basis of his verbal assurance."

Deuba said that it had been more than a month since he had handed over a letter written by Prachanda (General Secretary of the CPN-Maoist) to the prime minister to which there had been no official response. "Till today the prime minister has not said anything to me about that letter."

"He speaks whatever comes to his mind at public functions," said Deuba. "Sometimes he tells Padma Ratna (Tuladhar) to initiate the talks, and sometimes he asks Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya to take the lead. I have managed to create an environment to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table but he does not trust me."♦

RNAC Chairman out to save job

Deshantar, 23 July 2000
It seems the efforts to remove the Executive Chairman of Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation for his alleged involvement in over three dozen shady deals during his three months there has come to an end. Hari Bhakta Shrestha, sensing that he could be fired, has begun calling board meetings at night and making decisions that could affect the corporation in the long run.

One such decision was last week's appointment of Pankaj Rana as the General Sales Agent (GSA) in Japan. The rights and responsibilities of a GSA is fixed by the Corporation. But because RNAC does not have a system to monitor what goes on, GSAs sometimes charge double fare and get away with it. That is why millions of rupees change hand on such appointments.

That was one reason why RNAC had decided three months ago to do away with GSAs altogether. Shrestha went against that decision by appointing Rana. Shrestha is said to have made Rs 25 million from the deal and is now rumoured to be running around power centres offering Rs 20 million to keep his job.

Shrestha was sent to RNAC to improve its management but at the moment he is concerned only about consolidating his own position. He has been visiting the prime minister, his advisers and his daughter. If Shrestha succeeds in persuading them to accept his money, his position will be strengthened.

A source at RNAC said that Rana had misused 600 RNAC tickets when he himself worked as an RNAC GSA in the past. The Corporation has been able to recover Rs 50 million from him so far, but he has yet to settle the accounts for another 400 tickets which would amount to Rs100 million.♦

Memorials

Pushpalal Shrestha and B.P. Koirala

Based on various reports in Nepali Newspapers, July 22, 2000
The nation paid homage to Late B.P. Koirala on the 18th B. P. Koirala Memorial Day. Late Koirala is the ideological guide of democracy in the Kingdom, including the ruling Nepali Congress. Various functions were organised in different parts of the country to mark the occasion.

Similarly, several leftist parties paid glorious tributes to Comrade Pushpalal, the founding father of the communist movement in Nepal, on the 22nd Pushpalal Memorial Day.

These two pioneering political leaders of the country were far ahead of their time and their ideals continue to hold importance in contemporary times.

Observers pointed out that more than ceremonies to mark these occasions, what the country really needs in the present situation is the courage of commitment and the spirit of sacrifice displayed by these two great sons of the nation.

B.P. Memorial Day, as well as Pushpalal Memorial Day, is commemorated in the first week of the Nepali month of Shrawan every year.♦

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Maoists have not come from the moon. They are the creation of pervasive poverty.
Ram Hari Joshi, Nepali Congress leader and former minister

Khabarkagaj Weekly, 20 July 2000

Minister's public statement: "The possibility of an increase in electricity tariff does not exist."
Press Reports: "Electricity to cost more"

MIN BAJRACHARYA

"The solution is: talk, talk and talk"

Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, foreign minister during the last days of the Panchayat, confirmed he is talking to the Maoists on behalf of the Prime Minister in an interview to Saptahik Bimarsha (21 July, 2000).

Excerpts:

Q. *It is rumoured that the Prime Minister has asked you to initiate talks with the Maoists. Is that true?*
A. Yes, the PM has asked me many times to begin talks with the Maoists in order to end the bloodshed and terror facing the country today. The Maoists have to sit down for talks and I am ready to create such an environment.

Q. *What did you tell the PM?*
A. I told him that the Maoist problem is a political one and it should be solved through talks as soon as possible.

Q. *What do think of the PM's intention?*
A. The PM feels that the talks should begin immediately and everyone should take the initiative to get it started.

Q. *If the PM were to give you the authority, would you be able to hold talks with the Maoists?*
A. I have sent word to the Maoists regarding negotiations through people close to them. They want to hold talks. And the government is also in favour of it.

Q. *If the Maoists don't come forward for a dialogue what should the government do?*
A. Both the government and the Maoists have to lay down their arms and talk. Nobody will benefit from all the killings. The problem can't be solved by oppression.

Q. *What is your suggestion to the high-level committee formed to solve this problem?*
A. [Sher Bahadur] Deubaji should become active. A conducive environment should be created for talks with Maoists. People are being killed daily. I say the solution is talk...talk...talk.

Q. *What should others do to make the PM's efforts successful?*
A. Girijababu is known to be bold. He is known to do what he says. He will become a historical political figure in Nepali politics if he succeeds in solving the Maoist problem through talks.

Q. *Is Girja Prasad Koirala the only indispensable personality in the country?*
A. At present there is no leader with such firm convictions. Therefore he has to work as his personality demands it.

Q. *But it is being said that the PM is facing opposition from within the Nepali Congress?*
A. Actually, that is not quite true. To make the country strong the Nepali Congress has to stand as one. I cannot understand why Girijababu is facing opposition. At present the whole nation should be helping the PM. The PM should also make a strong effort to bring all the political parties together to solve this issue.

Q. *Is it true that Kishunji (Krishna Prasad Bhattarai) and Girijababu have resolved their differences?*
A. Kishunji and Girijababu have to come together. There is no other way for them. The moment they come together the Nepali Congress will also become united.

Q. *Will they be able to work together?*
A. If they want the best for the nation and the people, they will have to. There should not be any misunderstanding between them. Only their unity can save the situation. This is not the time for them to fight for power. As soon as they unite the Congress will become so strong that no one will be able to break it.

Q. *You joined the Congress party once and then left. Why?*
A. I joined the Congress because I wanted to work. When I did not find such an environment there I left. But there is no alternative to the Nepali Congress in the country. It is the only true gatekeeper of democracy. But the party could do with some improvement.

Q. *Won't you join any other party?*
A. I haven't seen any party better than the Congress. In fact, I will join it again if there is a working environment.

Q. *What do you think of the King's role at present?*
A. The King has stuck to his constitutional role so far. The King's charisma has grown as a constitutional monarch.

Q. *If the palace should once again act against democracy...?*
A. The King will only hurt himself if he takes any steps against democracy.

Q. *What would happen if such a step were to be taken?*
A. Nepalis are very aware. They love democracy. If the King were to act against democracy, the people would go against monarchy. The King should stick to his present role. He should not be instigated by anyone.

Q. *Is there no alternative to democracy?*
A. Not only in Nepal, there is no alternative to democracy anywhere in the world. Therefore no other system will work in Nepal.

Q. *You were a communist leader in the past. Have the communists really become democratic now?*
A. In Nepal, the communists have not been able to become fully committed to democracy. Their public face is different from the reality inside. Until they accept constitutional monarchy and multi-party system as part of their ideology, they will not become fully democratic.

Q. *But the UML claims to be a true democratic party.*
A. UML will become a real democratic party only after they get their act together. The UML has a future only if it presents itself as a socialist party.

Q. *Why such anger towards the communists?*
A. Even though I was a communist once, I left because I did not like their policies.

Q. *Aren't you interested in becoming a communist again?*
A. I will never join a communist party. I have no illusions about them any more. If I do join a political party, it will probably be the Nepali Congress.

Q. *Since you have been an Ambassador as well as a Foreign Minister, how do you view the impending visit of the Prime Minister to India?*
A. The Prime Minister is going to India as a representative of Nepal and the Nepali people, not just as a leader. Hence, if he can present the problems of Nepal and succeed in convincing India about their seriousness, his stature in Nepali politics will grow.

Q. *Under present circumstances, how do you rate Girja Prasad Koirala?*
A. Girijababu is a courageous person. He can express his views clearly. My understanding is that Girja Prasad Koirala can also attain the stature of B.P. (Koirala). He can also become immortal in history, but for that he will have to match up to B.P.'s achievements. The ball is now in Girijababu's court. ♦

FREEDOM

MIN BAJRACHARYA

MIN BAJRACHARYA

"The announcement was so sudden that nobody knows what exactly to do next."

-Kamaiya campaigner

HEMLATA RAI

The 17 July government announcement abolishing the system of virtual slavery known as kamaiya came as a sudden surprise. No one expected the movement to free the bonded labourers that began on 1 May, the International Labour Day, to come to a denouement so soon.

Certainly not the powerful landed class from the western Nepal terai where the practice is entrenched. The rich farmers (known rather innocuously as kisan, or farmer) who relied on their pool of bonded labourers suddenly found themselves without workers in the middle of the farming season. But for the dozens of jubilant kamaiyas who sang and danced their way through the Kathmandu streets last week that was the least of their concerns.

The announcement affects thousands of kamaiyas concentrated in the western districts of Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur. A 1995 government study estimated the kamaiya population in these districts to be 25,700 from 16,400 families. Three-quarters of them were bound to their landlord by perpetual debt. Under this system, the burden of debt repayment shifts automatically to the eldest son after the death of the head of the family.

Non-governmental organisations, however, estimate the number is closer to 200,000. According to the Backward Society Education (BASE), a grassroots organisation which has been in the forefront in the campaign to free kamaiyas, 98 percent of them are the indigenous Tharu people.

Soon after the celebrations, however, the harsh reality of an uncertain future loomed large. Thaga Chaudhari of Kanchanpur was exultant that his 35-year ordeal as a kamaiya was finally over, but before leaving the capital he said: "Now we appeal to the government to make arrangements for our housing."

Rehabilitation of kamaiyas may prove difficult, especially since the kisans are likely to resist the government ruling that allows up to 10 years' imprisonment for keeping bonded labourers. They are particularly agitated since the freed kamaiyas have also been released from all debt obligations that bind them to their 'masters'. (The landlords are planning to take the matter to court.)

Neither the government nor the NGOs campaigning for the kamaiyas seem prepared to meet the challenge of rehabilitation. "The announcement was so sudden that nobody knows what exactly to do next," said an NGO activist involved in the kamaiya freedom campaign.

So far, the only relief has been announced by BASE, which has made arrangements to support freed kamaiya families with one month's house rent and food-supply for 10 days. Action is needed urgently, says BASE member Yagya Raj Chaudhary, who helped kick-start the kamaiya freedom campaign in Kailali district.

Chaudhary says that the government should mobilise local administrative bodies to identify kamaiyas and for relief distribution and rehabilitation processes. "But first the Kamaiyas should be issued freedom certificates, then the government should provide them housing facilities and the fund essential for their rehabilitation," he adds.

Two days after the historic announcement, the Land Reforms and Management Ministry introduced a bill in Parliament proposing to outlaw the bonded labour system and ensure the welfare of freed kamaiyas. But activists doubt if the government will act with the same alacrity in rehabilitating them.

The lack of reliable data on Kamaiyas is sure to pose challenges for one. Krishna Raj Adhikary at the Land Reforms Ministry said work has started updating the statistics on kamaiyas, but added: "But we will be able to work for kamaiya welfare only if we receive additional funds." The Finance Ministry has not announced any assistance for the kamaiyas so far, and the National Planning Commission admits to being caught "rather unprepared".

Following a five-year-old tradition, this year too the government allocated funds to train about 1000 kamaiyas with different skills. But the Rs 14.5 million meant for pre-planned activities are painfully inadequate, now that landlords have already begun evicting kamaiyas off their lands.

"The wrath of the kisans against the kamaiyas was anticipated. The government has to mobilise local administrative bodies to protect the freed kamaiyas from being displaced from the land where they have built their homes," said Prem Parajuli of Kamaiya Concern Group, a grouping of NGO and government representatives.

All the freed kamaiyas need is some support initially. "We will work hard for wages, but the government has to provide us shelter for our sustenance," said Asha Ram Bangaura, who took part in the Kathmandu sit-in.

Activist-economist Meena Acharya believes that the labour market has plenty of opportunities to offer the kamaiyas: "Their sustainability depend on how promptly and effectively the government delivers them immediate relief in terms of food and shelter."

She may be wrong there. The terai's job market has already reached a point of saturation, as a 1997 study of International Labour Organisation pointed out. Inter-regional migration and pressure from workers from across the border has already lowered the wage rate to the minimum. In this situation, the younger generation of the newly freed kamaiyas who opt for jobs outside agriculture are likely to become vulnerable to exploitation all over again. ♦

Kamaiya Moti Chaudhary takes the mike at the Bhadrakali sit-in. Kamaiyas freed earlier learn new skills to prepare them for freedom (top).

Posing with family, Phulpati Chaudhary and his 13-year-old son Ram Chaudhary (far right) were both kamaiyas.

RESH SHRESTHA

COLUMN by PRATYOSH ONTA

Emergency relief for free kamaiyas

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Onta gives speech at the Bhadrakali rally last week.

Following the government's announcement declaring the end of the Kamaiya system (of which bonded labour was a part), the power elite of Kathmandu have made two sets of commentaries. The first, coming from politicians (and certain big NGOs) consists of attempts at self-praise. The party in power, the Nepali Congress (NC), and the main opposition, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), are both engaged in fabricating histories of their 'active' involvement in 'liberating' the Kamaiyas.

The NC claim is that, through this declaration, its long history of effecting 'revolutionary' changes in Nepali society has been further consolidated. For its part, the UML claims that it forced the NC government to make the announcement by registering a motion of stricture in the parliament.

Nowhere in these arrogant claims is acknowledgement of the fact that the government announcement came on the fifth day of a sit-in at Bhadrakali in downtown Kathmandu by more than 120 kamaiyas. Nor are we told that national and local level leaders of both parties continued to keep kamaiyas even as the latter started their freedom movement by registering petitions in the offices of the village development committees (VDC) or chief district officers in far- and mid-western Nepal since 1 May. The efforts of the kamaiyas themselves to realise their freedom and their historic journey from Geta VDC in Kailali district to Bhadrakali are all but ignored in these claims of credit-seekers.

The second set of commentaries, offered by politicians and NGOs alike, draws our attention to the rehabilitation of ex-kamaiyas. The government has already stated that providing land to ex-kamaiyas is high in its priority. It has also promised to implement skill development and income-generating programmes and provide employment to free kamaiyas. Government sources have said that such work will be carried through the respective district development committees (DDC) and the funds necessary to execute it will be provided through a Kamaiya Welfare Trust.

Whether these long-term measures are the most appropriate ones or what kinds of institutions are needed to execute them cannot be discussed in detail until the text of the concerned Act proposed by the government is made public. One can only hope that before parliamentary debate on the subject begins, the draft Act will be made available to ex-kamaiyas and their views sought through the Kamaiya Mukti Sangarsha Samiti. In addition, individuals and institutions that have played critical supporting roles in this movement must also be consulted. In particular, the parliament has to seek the advice of the Kamaiya Andolan Panchalan Samiti led by Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary before formulating the law on kamaiya rehabilitation.

Unfortunately, all this is going to take some time and that is why we need to focus on emergency relief for former Kamaiyas. Ever since 1 May, kamaiyas have been forced to leave their homes. The number of such displaced kamaiyas has increased at a greater pace since the 17 July announcement. As of Sunday of this week, this number had reached about 800 and sources in Dhangadi in Kailali district told the writer that they were expecting the arrival of larger numbers of displaced kamaiyas from Kanchanpur and other districts. Providing temporary housing and basic food and health care to them is going to be increasingly more difficult as the numbers swell up after the end of the planting season in the next few days.

That is why emergency relief measures must be executed right away. State agencies, the Red Cross, I/NGOs, and coalitions of free kamaiyas must get their act together if a colossal disaster is to be avoided. The government's local offices must designate public lands where temporary shelters for displaced ex-Kamaiyas can be built. Government, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and I/NGOs must come up with emergency funds to cover their food expenses for the next two to three months. The public at large must also pitch in through voluntary work, or provide funds. The scale of such emergency relief operations must match our response to big natural disasters in recent years. Otherwise, free kamaiyas will fall prey to hunger and disease. ♦

(Pratyoush Onta is a social activist who was involved in the movement to free kamaiyas.)

COLUMN

by JOSEPH STIGLITZ

Think globally, act accordingly

The issue isn't whether Nepal should be a part of the globalised world, it is how to respond to it.

The riots in Seattle and marches in Washington have brought home to many people in developed countries that globalisation does not benefit everybody. There are some darker sides: the plight of the poor is sometimes not taken into account, the institutions that govern globalisation are less than transparent, and there is a fundamental undermining of democratic processes.

There is strong evidence that the free flow of goods and services has resulted in faster economic growth of developing countries, that protectionism has in most places had very adverse consequences. Countries like Singapore have based whole development strategy on foreign direct investment which has integrated them into a global market economy.

Another aspect of globalisation, which is far more ambiguous, is the global flow of short-term capital. It was the opening up of short-term capital markets in East Asia that led to the most severe global economic crisis in almost 60 years.

There is also the globalisation of labour, and this has not proceeded at the same pace that the globalisation of capital has occurred. Wall Street and financial markets have been very strong advocates of opening up the world to capital flows, but they have been much less open to a free flow of labour.

Whether one likes it or not, global events have enormous effect within countries. India is lowering its tariffs as it becomes fully integrated into WTO. This is going to have profound a implication for Nepali industries.

Some of the opportunities Nepal offers will no longer be there. But one has to understand that India is doing this for reasons that have nothing to do with Nepal; they are driven by international concerns.

The issue isn't whether to be a part of the globalised world, it's how to respond to it. If you look over Nepal's history of the last 40 years there has been enormous progress, but what is quite striking are the great gaps: Nepal is one of the two countries in the world where female life expectancy is lower than that of males.

Literacy is up. But still only 66 percent of the males and 30 percent females are literate. There is growing concern about the quality of education. The key issue facing Nepal today is how to promote development that brings benefits to the poor when 42 percent of the population live in absolute poverty and there is a very large gender gap.

Many of the key ingredients to that policy are well understood. For instance, it is not possible for Nepal to have a higher standard of living as long as its population increases at the present rate. The evidence is very strong that educated women have smaller families. Nepal's female literacy gap is not only disturbing in its own right, but is a very strong development issue.

How is Nepal to generate the resources for development? Raising taxes is difficult. Nobody likes to pay taxes. Raising taxes on small business is especially difficult. Tax structures that are designed to work well for developed countries have to be re-examined in the context of developing countries.

Some tax systems are more corruption-resistant than others, and we have to look for taxes less prone to distortions from uneven enforcement and evasion. Tax structures in less developed countries like Nepal have to recognise administrative capacity also. It may be better to have single-rate, broad-based taxes rather than highly differentiated rates where you have enormous amounts of discretion.

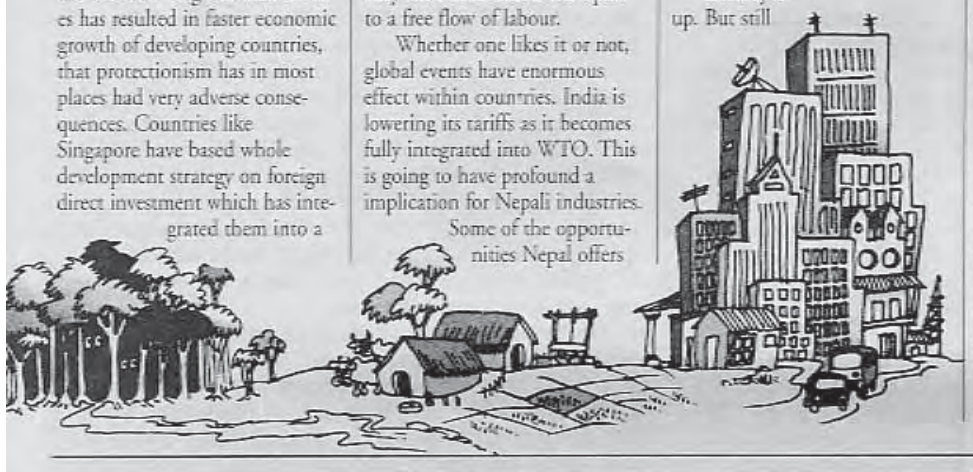
Tax collection is related to devolution and decentralisation. Democracy must be a part of the process of improving delivery of services at the local level. Meaningful devolution can bring health care and education to the grassroots.

In Nepal there is frustration that while the decentralisation policy is legislated, there aren't the resources at the local level. Meaningful devolution provides resources to decision-makers at the local level either through block grants or by allowing them to impose local taxes. There is a strong case for providing a tax basis so that there is accountability, and people pay to get benefits.

For an effective financial sector there has to be a credit culture: if people borrow money they have to pay it back. Otherwise they have to give up the collateral. One characteristic in many countries, Bangladesh is one, is that there is a 100 percent repayment rate by small farmers, and it is the rich who default. Evidently there is something about being wealthy that makes it difficult to repay loans.

If you don't make the wealthy repay loans you will undermine the credit culture and you will not have a financial system that works. You also need to have supervision. Everybody talks about public sector corruption. In the absence of adequate supervision there is enormous corruption also in private sector banking. ♦

(Joseph Stiglitz was chief economist and senior vice-president of the World Bank from 1997-1999 where he played a key role in devising its Comprehensive Development Framework for developing countries. This piece is adapted from a speech he gave at the Nepal Council of World Affairs in June.)



Radisson goes public

Subscription to Radisson Hotel's 1.25 million ordinary shares opened on Tuesday. This came about just 18 months after the hotel began operations. Radisson has thus become the fourth hotel to go public. (The others are Soaltee, Yak and Yeti and the yet-to-open Hyatt-Tara Gaon Regency.) Oriental Hotels will continue to retain the majority holding in Radisson.

Unlike other five-star properties that sit on spacious grounds, Radisson is built on a relatively small area. But because it is right in the heart of Kathmandu's diplomatic and corporate enclave, it has been able to make major inroads in the hospitality market.

"That's going to be an advantage as Kathmandu's traffic worsens," says Ian Barrow, General Manager of Radisson. "Our target is to do as much business as other five star hotels which would be an incredible achievement for a company that has been in business for just two years." He aims to achieve a turnover of Rs 700 million within three years. Says Barrow, "My job is to ensure good operating profits where we've done fairly well."

Despite Nepal's shrinking summer tourist arrivals—especially because of a decrease in tourists from the Mediterranean countries—the hotel has managed a reasonable occupancy rate. With only 170 rooms, that becomes relatively easier.

Radisson has turned its "disadvantage" in terms of property by going vertical. It's swimming pool is located on the fifth floor. The plan now is to build two restaurants, one adjoining the pool and another on the roof. Another distinct edge it has over competitors are the meeting rooms of different sizes that can accommodate from eight to 800 people.

The fact that most of Nepal's tourists are backpackers does not discourage Barrow, who's seen Bali in Indonesia transform from a haunt for tourists hunting for the "exotic" into a five-star destination.

"We need to begin looking at positioning ourselves as a higher-level market," says Barrow.

Grindlays Gazette

FOREIGN CURRENCY

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.20	6.00	1.37	5.12
LIBOR	6.62	4.39	6.06	0.22	3.35

Expectation of Yen rate high dimmed somewhat this week after a big Japanese retailer filed for bankruptcy, leading to new concerns about Japan's financial health.

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	% CHG
GOLD(Ounce)	283.10	284.25	-0.40
OIL(Barrel)	31.40	29.75	5.55
EUR	0.94	0.95	-1.59
GBP	1.50	1.52	-1.32
JPY	108.15	106.70	1.36
CHF	1.65	1.62	1.84
AUD	0.59	0.59	-1.58
INR	44.71	44.70	0.02

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT	PREVIOUS
Call Money Avg.	5.50 pct	5.20 pct
84 Days t/bill	5.08 pct	5.10 pct
91 Days t/bill	5.32 pct	5.33 pct
365 Days t/bill	6.18 pct	6.16 pct
Repo rate	6.18 pct	5.83 pct

National savings bonds worth NPR 800m floated two weeks ago by the Central Bank was not fully subscribed. Market liquidity remained tight due to year-end tax payment obligations. Due to tight liquidity, few banks are expected to bid for the Treasury Bills. Expected range for the 91 days T-bills: 5.30 to 5.60%.

BANK RATES (DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/4.0	5.37
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0	6.81
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5	13.58
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0	13.53
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5	11.56
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0	11.00
MISC LOAN	16.5/14.0	15.17

The dollar was stronger than the Yen and European currencies amidst improved sentiments of US assets and expectations of a soft-landing scenario in the US. Euro was undermined by waning expectations of interest rate hike in the Euro-zone after a recent weaker-than-expected European economic data. The Yen remained underpinned by heightened speculations fanned by rate-related comments by Japanese officials that a hike was imminent. The Indian rupee traded steadily and sustained light import demand. Dollar purchases by state-run banks will keep the rupee from firming despite likely inflows from the corporate groups.

(The information is only indicative. Compiled and made available by Nepal Grindlays Bank Limited).

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

The power to privatise

The price of power in Nepal (both political and electrical) is number one in the region. We have the most unreliable electricity supply in the Subcontinent (barring perhaps North India) and with assistance from international funding agencies, we are guaranteed that it is expensive.

With Nepal's abundant hydropower, electricity should be cheap. But the cost of power reflects bad planning and bad management on the part of successive governments and donors.

A utility company that can boast of employing the highest number of employees per megawatt (MW) of electricity tends to find raising tariffs a better way to pay for itself than rationalising costs. To supply 300MW we have over 9000 employees: a staggering 300 people per megawatt.

The question everyone asks is: why should power tariffs be increased by 30 percent when losses from leakage and theft continue to hover at around 35 percent? Just cut the losses so that the overburdened Nepali consumer does not have to pay more. If a landlord goes broke should the tenant be asked to pay higher rent?

Like hundreds of goats that get slaughtered during Dasain, the government and the Asian Development Bank need a scapegoat to cover up for their inefficiency. And they have found instant, popular targets in the private power producers.

Private power investors were asked to move in to fill the post-Arun III power shortfall crisis. They took big risks investing in a country that is not rated, and a customer that is financially unsound. Private producers are not donors, they need returns on their investment. If commercial borrowing costs were to be added to projects like the soft-loan funded Kali Gandaki A, its output would cost one and half times the price private projects sell their power for.

At this rate, Nepal may not see another private power developer coming in for another five years. Who are the developers going to sell to? There is no legal framework for export to India, and the domestic customer feels it is already in an over-supply situation. Then you start treating private producers like licensed dacoits who have come to rob Nepal of its foreign exchange. It's a wonder they haven't all left.

True, the tariff issue has political ramifications. And the Nepal Electricity Authority has been burdened over the years with too many consultants brimming with impractical solutions. The money that has been spent on consultants in the past 15 years could have easily built a medium-sized power project.

Nepal's confusion over its power policy is as old as our democracy. International, bilateral and multilateral agencies are partly to blame for imposing their conflicting priorities on us. We were once forced to plan for Arun III and nothing else, the Arun III got cancelled so we decided to allow only private companies in generation, but now bilateral agencies are throwing in money to build public projects.

We take years to ratify an agreement signed for power trade agreements, and then we go begging to the ADB to dictate to us rather than try to commercialise the power sector. Why not unbundle the NEA to separate Generation, Transmission and Distribution companies? Then you can privatise distribution to provide reliable electricity at reasonable rates. The government can play the role of a regulator and just own the national transmission grid.

We have a Water and Energy Commission, a Ministry of Water Resources, a Department of Electricity Development and Nepal Electricity Authority, all controlled by the government. It is time for the government to do all Nepalis a big favour and get out of utilities for good. ♦

Readers can post their views and discuss issues at artha beed@yahoo.com

Maybe you can drive my car

If there is one time of the year when thoughts turn to buying a car, it is during the rains. Nepali Times offers a beginner's guide to buying your first car.

A NEPALI TIMES SURVEY

Suddenly, in Kathmandu's car market, small is beautiful. Consumers have discovered the compacts that come in a bewildering variety of models, price tags and financing options to choose from.

The city's narrow streets are getting more crowded every day. An average ride from Lazimpat to Patan now takes at least 45 minutes at rush hour, but motor cars are selling like hot momos.

Not so long ago dealers of popular brands would have booking lists, with new car buyers waiting up to three months for the right model or colour. But that is changing, there is a high turnover of stock, and customers are lifting cars right off the showrooms.

Until recently car buyers would have to wait up to three months for the car of their choice. No longer.

"From September there will be no waiting time for Marutis," says Arun K. Chaudhary, Managing Director of the Chaudhary Group, country dealer for Maruti.

Maruti has the highest passenger car sales in the country, with 60 percent of the market share. This is because it pushed the hardest, says Chaudhary. "We introduced consumer financing, and we have good after-sales service, even trade-ins."

The smart cars, some even smaller than the Safa tempos, can weave through Kathmandu's tight traffic and the narrow alleys without much effort. And, with the capital's roads in a state of permanent disrepair, their manoeuvribility is also a plus point for those planning a car.

Dealers not only offer cars but also financing. Otherwise, they can point you to "sister" concerns waiting with the cash. Banks are also in the financing business and offer lower interests than finance companies, but that, of course, depends on your ability to convince on you intend to pay back the loan.

The list of compacts to choose from is getting longer. This is mainly due to the range that is being produced in India, and also because a market has been created by a growing urban class that can afford family cars.

So far, the indomitable Maruti 800 rules the road, almost outnumbering all competitors put together. Its low-cost maintenance has also made it the chosen vehicle for taxi operators. In this category Maruti has no competition, except for its own Omni vans.

Maruti's Zen is positioned to hook buyers looking for cars that stand apart from the taxis on the Kathmandu roads. But, it is facing tough competition from other brands.

Among them are Hyundai's Santro, Daewoo's Matiz and Fiat's Uno, all of whom already have a sizeable presence in Kathmandu. Waiting on the sidelines is Malaysia's Kancil by Perdua, which is expected to hit the Kathmandu roads in a big way by August-end.

Both Santro and Matiz come with designer exteriors that appeal to those looking for a hip look. They also offer a power steering option. Fiat offers another extra: diesel engines that comply with Euro-2 standards.

The right choice

The price of a car depends on how much you are willing to spend: the deeper you dig into your pocket the more bells and whistles you get.

The key to deciding on a car is to know exactly what you are looking for. For example, if you plan to make your first car to be your last, then a better buy would be one in the higher price category.

Doing without various options can save you a pile. A Zen without AC sells at Rs 76,000 less than one with AC. Similarly, a standard version of Santro comes at Rs 880,000 while the same car with options added can cost as much as Rs 1,020,000.

No car in the market can match the price of a standard Maruti 800 at Rs 656,000. Maruti's Omni, which can double both as delivery van and family transport, comes at Rs 662,000. At these prices the Maruti 800s and the Omnis have almost no competitor to worry about.

The market beyond the Maruti 800 and Omni range is a bit crowded. This is where the Santro, the Matiz, the Fiat, the Kancil and the Zen are fighting for a share of the pie. The list of options they offer is endless—rear windscreen wiper, power windows, music system, matching body and bumper colours, vanity mirrors, gear locks, central locking, power steering, and so on.

Two new brands are entering this segment soon—Daihatsu's 1000cc Cuore and Tata's Indica 1400cc. Cuore is expected in the market within a few months, and the Indica will arrive by the end of September.

There is a higher level in the small car business. This is where the competition is among Toyota's Echo, Nissan's March and Daihatsu's Sirion, all Japanese makes.

Given the size of the market, sales in this category are not so bad either. Toyota sells about eight Echos each month. This car comes in 1000cc and 1300cc models, and cost between Rs 1.6-1.8 million and Rs 2-2.2 million, depending on the options you choose. March, which was selling at about Rs 1.4 million, is now planning to get an "improved" version that could cost slightly higher.

"It is difficult to compete with cheaper Indian cars," says Kailash Rajbhandary, Senior Deputy Director at United Traders Syndicate, the Toyota dealer. "But what also counts is after-sales service and resale value."

About 2000 vehicles are sold every year in the country. That is still a small market to play in, but it is one that is definitely growing. Maruti has already begun expansion plans with showrooms in Pokhara and Butwal.

With more brands entering the competition it can only mean good news to the customer. ♦

COP controversy

Small car imports into Nepal ground to a halt as soon as the government's new emission standards were announced last year. (The Nepali standard is the same as Euro-1.) This resulted from the confusion over Type Approval and the Conformity of Production (COP) that importers need to comply with.

COP tests are used to ascertain if the emission levels of cars on the road are within permissible limits. In India the tests are done after 5000 cars are produced or six months after a model is out in the market. But the COP requirement poses a problem to manufacturers coming out with new models or that produce a smaller number of cars of any particular model.

"Asking for COP is like asking for a birth certificate before the baby is born," says Sampurna Kansakar, General Manager, Bhajuratna Agency Pvt. Ltd, the sellers of Fiat Uno. "It is impossible to produce that for new models, you cannot discriminate against some in a free market?"

Kansakar's reference was to a later government decision to waive COP requirement for Japanese and Korean-made cars and allow imports on the basis of manufacturer certification only. When asked to explain the rationale behind this move, Govinda Raj Bhatta, Secretary at the Ministry of Population and Environment, said, "The waiver for Japanese cars was made after we were assured by the Japan government that its manufacturers did their own testing and certification. But we're already working to make the requirement uniform."

Other car sellers are equally angry about the government's inability to control the quality of petrol. "Euro-1 is good for the country. It will help keep the environment clean," says Lokmanya Golcha, Vice-Chairman of Golchha Organisation, the Daihatsu dealer. "But if you don't control what goes into cars, it is like asking someone to grow healthy by eating rotten food."

Make/Model	Price (in rupees)
Maruti 800	656,700
Maruti Zen LX	793,100
Zen LX (with AC)	880,000
Zen VX	988,900
Zen VX classic	1,028,500
Fiat Uno Diesel EL	1,050,000
Fiat Uno Diesel ELX	1,250,000
Santro Standard	880,000
Santro (full options)	1,020,000
Matiz	875,000
Matiz (full options)	1,150,000
March	1,400,000
Kancil	850,000+

(Prices are indicative only.)

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Fowl play on screen

Chicken Run is a rare hand-crafted plasticine gem, a feat of clay.

REVIEW BY **PHILIP FRENCH**

This fine family entertainment is the first feature-length film from Aardman, the animation studio based in Bristol, England, that has been dazzling us for 20 years with its feats of clay. This one is co-directed by Peter Lord, co-founder of Aardman, and Nick Park, the creator of Wallace and Gromit and winner of Oscars for Creature Comforts, The Wrong Trousers and A Close Shave, which opened nearly five years ago and was loosely inspired by Brief Encounter.

Chicken Run is a very close parody of the prisoner-of-war camp genre, especially The Great Escape. In this case, however, the PoWs are Plasticine chickens and the camp is a farm in Yorkshire surrounded by barbed wire, policed by vicious guard dogs and run by the ferocious Mrs Tweedy whose jack-booted resemblance to Irma Grise of Belsen infamy is slightly mitigated by her dim husband who looks like Wallace's black-sheep brother. In contrast to the not dissimilar Babe, there are no decent humans here.

The camp's escape officer is Ginger and the movie begins with a lively montage of ingenious escape attempts. Between each of them Ginger is thrown into the coal-bin cooler where, like Steve McQueen in The Great Escape, she bounces a baseball. The movie takes on a darker shade when a hen is executed by Mrs Tweedy for failing to lay eggs (we see the shadow of the falling axe), and it threatens to become positively black when the Tweedies decide to switch from producing eggs to manufacturing chicken pies, thus turning the farm into an extermination camp.

But Park and his associates know that while swans can be tragic, hens can only be comic. So they endeavour to make us care about their poultry, but avoid easy pathos and seek to keep sentimentality at bay.

This isn't an allegory in the tradition of The Parliament of Fowls or Animal Farm, and there are no uplifting, heart-rending songs in the Disney manner. The only musical interlude is a jive session the hens have with Rocky, a flying Rhode Island rooster from the States (Mel Gibson) who has escaped from a circus and landed in the camp. Rocky provides a foil for Fowler, the ageing cock-of-the-walk nostalgically obsessed with his days in the RAF, and some love interest for Ginger.

More important, Ginger gets him to start a flying school for a mass escape by air. This hilariously disastrous enterprise is observed by a pair of black-marketeer rats who mock the hens' antics with lines such as 'Birds of a feather flop together' and 'Poultry in motion'. In fact, except for refraining from references to getting laid, there is not a single chicken joke or pun that goes unused, and I now even feel bad about writing 'e.g.'.

Flying the coop using your own wings would have been the inspirational way out, but the Aardman people wisely reject it. Instead they opt for a flying machine of the sort built in Colditz and run up by the stranded survivors in Flight of the Phoenix. This gives Park the chance to create another eccentric contraption of a Heath-Robinson or Roland Emmett sort. Stalag Luft III would have had trouble containing inmates who could transform a string of fairylights into a flarepath and use the ratchets of a deck-chair to create a take-off ramp.

Naturally Mac, the camp's resident engineer, is, like Star Trek's Scotty, from north of the border.

The film flags slightly from time to time, but for most of the way it is prodigally and prodigiously inventive, both visually and verbally. We know that every second of the film involves hours of painstaking physical work moving and adjusting the figures and sets. But even if you didn't know about the laborious process of clay animation, you would recognise the virtuosity and sense something lovingly hand-crafted in Chicken Run.

(The Observer) Chicken Run (83 mins, U) Directed by Peter Lord and Nick Park; featuring the voices of Mel Gibson, Julia Sawalha, Miranda Richardson, Jane Horrocks

Nepal's glo

The Sur Sudha team (l to r), Bijay, Surendra and Prer Mermaid of Copenhagen.

be-trotting musical mbassadors

with the Little

Nepal's best-known musical group has popularised Nepali folk and semi-classical music among international audiences. But within Nepal, the band is coming in for criticism.

SALIL SUBEDI

The Nepali music band Sur Sudha recently returned home after completing a 40-day tour of the UK, France and Germany during which they performed a total of 25 charity and professional concerts.

The three-man group kicked off their latest tour at London's Millennium Dome in early June. "It was splendid. We enjoy being among the few Nepalis spreading news about Nepal throughout the world," said Surendra Shrestha, a member of the band. After London, they moved on to France, where the 240 CD albums they were carrying got sold out. They wanted to fly over more CDs from back home, but, explains Surendra, who also doubles as the manager, "Nepal's tax department had some weird reason not to allow that."

Sur Sudha is perhaps the only Nepali band whose albums can be found at the world music sections of music stores in Hong Kong, Singapore and Europe. Their speciality is their unique blending of classical notes with melodious Nepali folk tunes.

The group's frequent international tours have popularised Nepali folk and semi-classical music among international audiences. But back home, the band is coming in for the kind of flak directed at anyone who becomes too popular too fast.

Purists say Sur Sudha plays weak classical compositions and improvised folk music, are not original and that fusing the two is an insult to both classical music and folk. The band has also been accused of selling its soul by performing at media events for big companies.

Sur Sudha's Prem Rana Autari doesn't seem all that worried by such criticism. "That is exactly where they are wrong. We are melodic bands. We combine classical and folk but that doesn't mean we are exploiting the genuineness of classical music," says the musician who is undoubtedly Nepal's most famous flautist.

Asked about their most memorable experience since they came together in 1987, the coy and ever-smiling sitarist Bijay Vaidya says it is the appreciation of international audiences. "Lively music awakens everyone. It reaches out to everyone."

The trio make a formidable combination. The most senior of them is Prem, whose sounds have been heard over Radio Nepal for decades. He's had experience working with orchestral ensembles in Bombay, and has also been through six years' training under India's flute legend Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia.

With nine years in Radio Nepal and ten years at the Royal Nepal Academy, he is a professional known for his breath-defying solos. "There was always an urge to be on my own. After we formed this band and started playing

we were like free birds. Appreciation from many different people from many parts of the world has inspired me most," says Prem.

Bijay has been playing the sitar since he was 16. He trained under Nepali sitar maestros Mamta Pradhan and Tara Bir Singh Tuladhar."I'm in love with the sitar," he says, a fact that anyone can see when he is in concert. He infects the whole atmosphere with his love and as he sways with the rhythmic build up of the music, the audience can't help but sway along. Surendra is the percussionist. On the tabla since eight, he learnt under Raju Agrawal and Hom Nath Upadhyaya in his early days. He finally turned professional after training under Pandit Chhotelal Mishra of India. "Music is my soul. It has been my best companion, my enlightenment and happiness," he says. "While playing the tabla I can actually experience the building up of energy in my fingers. This instrument is the pulse of our soul."

Sur Sudha was the first Nepali group to record a CD album in Nepal. Since their debut with "Images of Nepal", there have been 11 more CDs. By now, they have played in every continent (except Antarctica), but it is in Germany and France where they have travelled the most.

They have also raised a fair bit of money for charity from their concerts. For instance, the proceeds of the European tour will go for the welfare of Nepali children. What that amount is, however, will be known only after the European organisers send the money over.

The group has recently begun a music school called the Sur Sudha Music Academy to train the younger generation. Their dream, as they put it, "is that everyone in this country understand and feel the richness of our culture and heritage through music."

It is perhaps in keeping with their ideals that Sur Sudha has been bringing well-known foreign artistes to an increasingly appreciative Kathmandu audience. The Hari Prasad Chaurasia-Zakir Hussain performance a couple of years ago (for which Sur Sudha was the opening act) was a huge success. Now they are working to organise a concert by famed Pakistani ghazal singer Ghulam Ali in late August. ♦

Nepal has not yet entered the real e-conomy, but some businesses have already seen the future.

GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

Anything with a total international value approaching US$ 400 billion in a globalised economy is bound to have an impact in even the remotest corners of the world.

In the last five years the distribution, marketing, sale and delivery of goods and services by electronic means have grown exponentially with far-reaching impact on the economy.

And rather than make newspapers extinct, the dot com revolution has pumped advertising dollars into the print media. Even in India full-page newspaper ads by Internet start-ups have become a regular feature and these have grossed 15 million dollars in the first four months of this year alone.

The growth in the IT sector shows no signs of abating, and it is estimated that the value of e-commerce will grow to US$1,300 billion by 2002. By the year 2003, up to 30 percent of the world economy will be traded online.

The Nepali economy may not be able to take full advantage of this growth for some time, but a beginning has already been made in the tourism and information service industries. Holiday and trek planning through e-mail exchanges are already quite common, although the industry has not yet graduated to online booking, confirmation, and real-time payments.

The information service companies deliver their "virtual goods" services electronically. Transcriptions, software development and GIS mapping are areas Nepali companies are active in.

Exposure to the international economy is forcing Nepali companies to have an Internet presence. Many brick-and-mortar Nepali companies now have a homepage although most have not begun to trade online.

Among those that do, Pasal.com and Dhukuti.com are credit card enabled sites. They are geared towards the foreign market, and sell traditional goods like carpets and pashmina online.

Munchahouse.com, the well-known Kathmandu general goods store, went online two months ago and specialises in gifts that the Nepali diaspora can send to people back home. They are already averaging one order a day, and total page views in June was 10,000.

"We've had to change many items that we used to sell traditionally. For example, we have added flowers and paintings. And we plan to go into jewellery," says Amit Tuladhar who looks after the internet part of the family business.

Nepalshop.com is another web site that calls you back to confirm an online booking. Cyberpasal.com is also getting operational soon. But the payment mechanism is still traditional with these sites: you pay when you receive the goods in hard cash.

Vertical portals are also few. Nepal handicraft association (www.nepalhandicraft.com.np) set up its web site, providing links to its members. Nepal Tourism board (www.welcomenepal.com) has also tried to create a tourism portal, but both are nothing more than an electronic edition of their printed brochures.

The Trade Promotion Centre (www.tpc.org.np) has tried to bring more by integrating database in the web site. "There are possibilities," says Lochan Lal Amatya, president of Computer Association of Nepal (CAN). "The Nepali information technology sector is at par with its counterpart in developed countries, and thus we have a level playing field,"

Information services sector is now also in a position to facilitate electronic commerce, as the infrastructure is already present. But, there are still many problems. Government regulations for both the Business to Consumer (B2C) and B2B e-commerce are non-existent, electronic transactions are not recognised, banks do not accept online payments, and the average Nepali does not have a credit card. Then there are logistical problems such as delivery since Kathmandu streets do not have names and houses are not numbered.

For B2C commerce to grow in Nepal, the price of computers and internet access have to come down to be affordable to the Nepali middle class. The traditional perception of doing business must also change.

Says Deepesh Pradhan of Yomari.com: "None of the traditional Nepali companies have prices listed on their web site. How can online commerce grow in this way?" People will simply not be interested, if they have to wait or go to the corner shop to find the price.

In the B2B arena, it is the Nepali IT companies that are furthest ahead. But they have their own set of problems. Export regulations that require proof of export is the major hurdle. Bijendra Shrestha of InfoNet Nepal, an export-oriented IT company, says: "We have traditional purchase orders, we use traditional banking channels, but we only use the Internet for export of goods. Banks are not sure how they should handle it."

Electronic payments, electronic orders, and electronic delivery of services are major incentives for international companies, but these tools cannot be used in Nepal. Neither can local companies use the Internet to order goods and services from abroad.

Until such a time as the government wakes up to virtual reality and changes its regulations to bring them in line, Nepal's B2C commerce will not be able to take off. ♦

Contest2win

Contest2win Nepal (nepal.c2w.com) defines itself as a "one stop contest shop which offers online contests to its registered members". What this means is that anyone with Internet access and the time to spare can visit this site, register to acquire a user ID, and then take part in any contest available on this site.

It is called one stop because all contests can be played from one site and it contains all the necessary information. Contest2win India, the parent venture of c2w Nepal, claims to be the first to offer this service in the world. Nepal is its first stop in its plan to go global. The site offers a platform to advertisers to promote their products or services by linking them with a contest. In return they are guaranteed a response to the ads from the players participating in them.

Earlier concepts of promotional contests in traditional media like newspapers, television and radio had certain in-built limitations. One could not be certain about a response from the organisers after filling out forms and mailing them. Moreover, since the actual event required a participant's physical presence the opportunities were narrowed for a potential contestant.

On c2w, the contests are available for periods ranging from a week to a month or more. This allows a longer shelf life, making it convenient for players and more effective for promoters.

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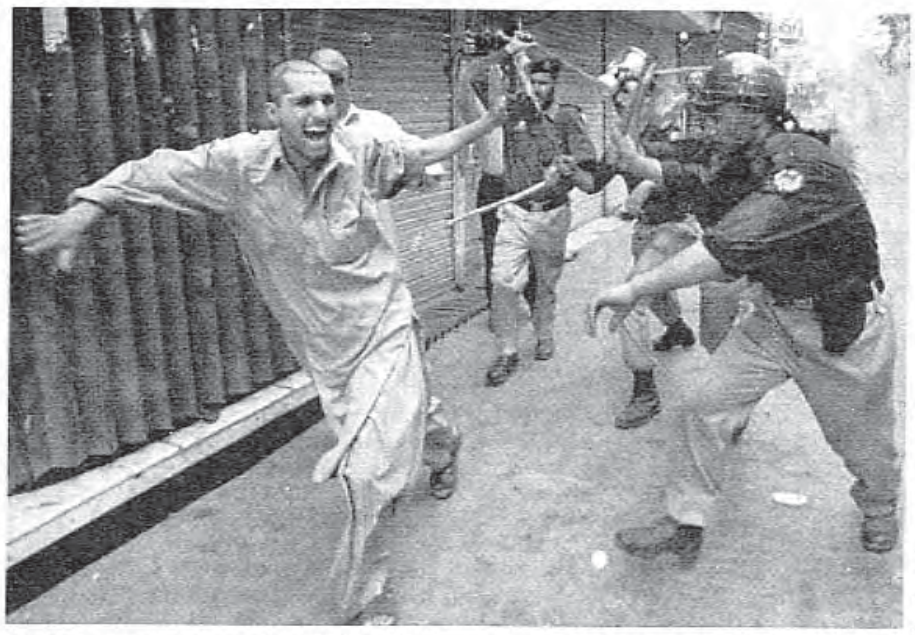


Police go after an anti-tax protestor in Rawalpindi.

GENERAL BEATS TAX EVADERS

With a vast parallel economy and ramshackle taxation system, tax evasion in Pakistan has begun to resemble a national pastime. Now the government is getting tough.

YOUSSAF RAFIQ IN ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's underground economy is booming, if guesstimates are anything to go by, at a massive all-time high of Rs 1,500 billion—nearly half the 1995 Gross Domestic Product.

On top of a market for smuggled goods valued at Rs 360 billion ($1=PRs 44), the government is losing out on Rs 100 billion in income tax and Rs 60 billion in general sales tax every year.

A glance at the 1993-94 Tax Directory—a first for Pakistan, and not repeated since—suggests that the richer you are, the less tax you pay, assuming you pay any tax at all.

The directory bears witness to just how staggering the problem of tax evasion is. In 1993-94, the entire National Assembly and two fabulously wealthy former prime ministers (Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif) paid fewer taxes than a single-tax payer—Khalid Ishaque, a successful lawyer (he coughed up Rs 5.8 million).

Large feudal landowners and farmers paid a miserable sum of Rs 2.2 million, while the entire textile industry, which accounts for over 70 percent of exports, paid less income tax than the employees of a single multinational company, Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI).

As for former president Farooq Leghari, and former Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif (brother of Nawaz), they simply didn't pay any taxes.

These days, Pakistan looks more and more like a nation of tax evaders rather than taxpayers. Out of a population of 130 million, only 1.4 million are registered as tax payers. Even for the few who pay, there are glaring inequalities and inconsistencies, and the system is riddled with corruption.

The almost total lack of credibility in the system of tax collection and assessment has fostered an in-built tendency to resist paying taxes. Untrained and underpaid tax officials wield huge discretionary powers, and regularly abuse the system with impunity.

"It is a fact that whatever you declare, it will not be accepted by the tax officials. If people were convinced that their (tax officials') assessments would be fair, many more would declare their true income," says bookseller Zamir Imam. "How can you expect a tax officer on a subsistence level salary to give a fair assessment?" he asks.

Another related question, asked by tax payers and evaders alike, is: "What do we get for the taxes we pay?"

"If you want water, you buy a tanker, if you want electricity, you buy a generator, if you want security, you hire a private guard," Ahmad Akram, a jewellery shop owner, points out. "And if you can't afford it, then you do without it."

"Usually, the money ends up in their (officials') pockets," he adds, voicing widely-held suspicions.

Tax officials can reopen cases which have already been assessed. According to Waheed Rana, a Faisalabad-based exporter, "this is a clear path to corruption."

Huge numbers of appeals lie before tax authorities or languish in courts. Even if successful, a tax refund can take up to 10 years.

Now, a programme of far-reaching tax reforms is being prepared by the military regime of Gen Pervez Musharraf, with a realistic and equitable approach based on people's actual ability to pay.

As Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz explains, "What Pakistan needs is not more and higher taxes, but more people to pay their taxes based on their capacity to pay."

For the first time in Pakistan, a comprehensive tax survey is being carried out encompassing 13 major cities. No distinction is being made between registered or unregistered taxpayers, or whether or not individuals are employees of the government.

The survey will support a seven-point reform package which includes widening the tax base, reducing the variety of taxes and taxation rates, simpler procedures, quicker and fairer resolution of disputes and computerisation.

"The general perception that the survey is meant to nab errant businessmen is incorrect," says Aziz. It will, he says, embrace "all potential tax payers."

One of the major goals of the survey is simply to get an accurate picture of the economy's size. The Central Board of Revenue has calculated that a massive Rs 100 billion could be raised in additional revenue from the so-called "real economy."

"The perception of Pakistan abroad," says Zahid Zaheer, secretary general of the Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry, "is of a country where you can commit the most heinous of [economic] crimes and never be caught or punished. This perception has to change both at home and abroad."

For his part, Musharraf seems to have embarked on a carrot-and-stick policy to enforce the tax reforms. On 9 June police in the town of Peshawar baton-charged and fired tear gas to disperse traders and shopkeepers protesting against the tax reforms, wounding at least four people.

At around the same time, the regime promised to cut down expenditure and to put up a web site with monthly details of government expenditure. ♦

(Gemini) (YOUSSAF RAFIQ is a special correspondent for the Karachi-based Financial Post.)

Climbing ban on Kanchenjunga

It has long been regarded as one of mountaineering's greatest challenges. Only three teams have ever reached the summit of Kanchenjunga by ascending its perilous north-east face.

But that route up the world's third highest mountain appears to have been shut off for good following a revolt by local Buddhists, who are incensed by what they regard as the desecration of the mountain by godless foreigners.

The state government of Sikkim has now banned expeditions to Kanchenjunga and seven others sacred peaks—just as 18 unclimbed mountains elsewhere in India have been opened for the first time..

Kanchenjunga, which straddles the border between Nepal and India, is viewed by the Sikkimese as both a god and the abode of gods.

The controversy erupted in April when the state government allowed an Austrian team to attempt the near-vertical trek up the 8,598-metre peak for US$ 20,000. The team, led by Austrian climber Willie Bauer, tried to assuage Buddhist feeling by agreeing to turn back 10 metres short of the top.

Reaction to the Austrians' presence on the sacred peak was furious. The Concerned Citizens of Sikkim, a non-governmental organisation, accused local rulers of selling out and wrote an acid letter comparing "trampling on Kanchenjunga" to leaving rubbish on a statue of Jesus.

Speaking from his home in Austria, Bauer, whose grandfather tried and failed twice to climb Kanchenjunga, said the ban was wrong. "We revere mountains in Austria too," he added. "Climbing does not mean the mountains and landscape cannot be preserved, but it does give the locals an opportunity of making some money." ♦ (The Guardian)

Basmati right

The battle over who controls the world's food supplies has escalated dramatically with the Indian government this month launching a legal challenge in the US against an American company which has been granted a patent on the world-renowned basmati rice.

It is thought to be the first time a government in a developing country has challenged an attempt by a US company to patent—and thus control the production of—staple food and crops in what campaigners dub the 'rush for green gold'.

Basmati rice, sought-after for its fragrant taste, was developed by Indian farmers over hundreds of years, but the Texan company RiceTec obtained a patent for a cross-breed with American long-grain rice. RiceTec was granted the patent on the basis of aroma, elongation of the grain on cooking and chalkiness. However, the Indian government last week filed 50,000 pages of scientific evidence to the US Patents and Trademarks Office, insisting that most high-quality basmati varieties already possess these characteristics. The US Patent and Trademarks office accepted the petition and will re-examine its legitimacy.

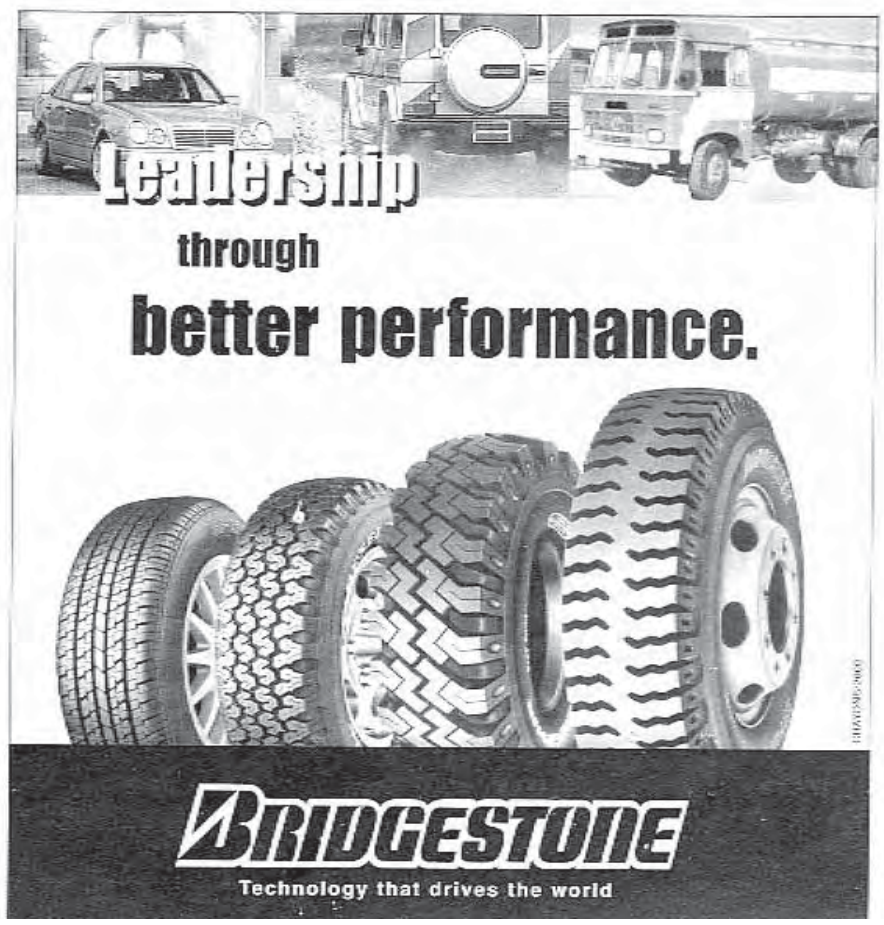
The patent—granted only in the US—gives RiceTec control over basmati rice production in North America. Farmers have to pay a fee to grow the rice and are not allowed to plant the seeds to grow the following year's crops. India fears the patent will severely damage exports from its own farmers to the US. In 1998, they exported almost 600,000 tonnes of basmati rice.

India has also objected to RiceTec calling the rice 'basmati', insisting the name should be used only for rice grown in the Basmati region of India. The Indian government is claiming similar status for basmati rice as that granted to Champagne, Cognac and Scotch whisky.

India's legal challenge is being support by ActionAid, which is launching a campaign to highlight the issue next week. Ruchi Tripathi said: "The basmati patent exposes the mounting threat posed by multinationals to crops developed and grown by poor farmers for generations."

There are currently more than 200 patents granted on rice, almost exclusively to US and Japanese companies. It is currently not possible to patent staple foods and crops in Europe or developing countries but a European directive is about to change that in the EU.

At the World Trade Organisation talks which start tomorrow, rich nations are expected to put pressure on developing nations to allow the patenting of crops in their own countries. Tripathi said: "If rich countries abuse their power to get their way in the World Trade Organisation, developing countries like India will lose the right to challenge patents on crops." ♦ (Observer)



COLUMN

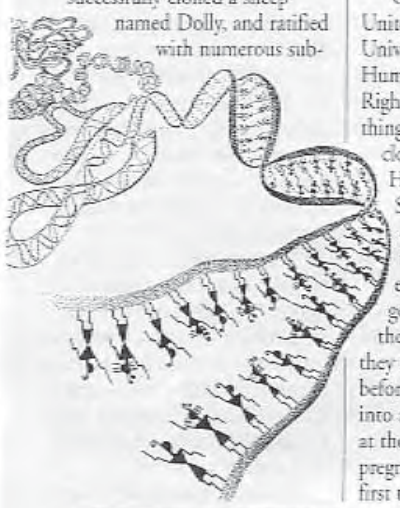
by RODRIGO BORJA

Human genome, inhuman society

Genetic engineering is very close to being able to clone human beings. This raises numerous philosophical, moral, theological, judicial, and political questions.

QUITO - The announcement by Dr J. Craig Venter, head of Celera Genomics, and Francis S.Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, that the human genetic code had been cracked shows that genetic engineering and biotechnology are very close to being able to clone human beings.

This raises numerous philosophical, moral, theological, judicial, and political questions regarding the creation of human life at the margin of what was considered the normal reproductive process. Once the possibility of cloning mammals was proved a few years ago when the Roslin Institute of Edinburgh, Scotland, successfully cloned a sheep named Dolly, and ratified with numerous subsequent experiments trials, humanity was confronted with the new scientific reality of holding "the instruction manual for building a human being", as Dr Collins said in December 1998.



This logically opened up discussion of the right of each human being to be unique and myriad other issues regarding human uniqueness. Western culture values individuality particularly highly and has zealously guarded its right to maintain it. This is the domain of bioethics, a neologism meaning the moral concern raised by technological advances of modern genetic engineering, which have come a long way.

On 9 December 1998, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, which among other things sought toprohibit the cloning of human beings. However, it couldn't prevent South Korean scientists directed by Dr Lee Boyeon from cloning a human embryo by inserting the genetic material of a cell into the egg of a donor, although they interrupted the experiment before the embryo could develop into a fetus, a process that occurs at the end of the third month of pregnancy in humans. This is the first time that a team of scientists has crossed the boundary of animal cloning and shown that it is scientifically and technologically possible to create a human being through unorthodox means.

Shortly after the South Korean experiment, it became known that American scientists of Advanced Cell Technology of Massachussetts had also produced a male human embryo through cloning, using the same technique employed to create Dolly. They later incinerated it. The scientists explained that their goal is to one day produce human tissue that can be used to cure diseases of the nervous system, diabetes, and Parkinson's disease.

There is no doubt that the medicine of the 21st century will be biotech medicine. Human diseases and defects will be prevented through genetic means because it is the genes that define and characterise each individual of the species. They contain all information about the operation of the body and mind and "draw" individuals with given aptitudes and defects that manifest themselves as limitations, diseases, and breakdowns of physical and mental health at a time determined by the genetic code. But the social risks inherent in the advances in genetic engineering are great because they could well lead to societies that are polarised and divided not by wealth, ethnicity, or education, as is the case today and has been in the past, but by the quality of genes.

In his book Back to Eden, Lee M. Silver, professor of molecular biology, ecology, and evolutionary biology at Princeton University, predicts that in the relatively near future there will be two classes of human genes: enhanced, and normal.

Enhanced genes will give people enormous physical and mental advantages, making them more healthy, intelligent and vital than others. But economic factors will limit these enhanced genes to the wealthy, because they have to be produced in a laboratory at considerable cost.

The result will be a polarised society in which government, the economy, finance, business management, communications, command of the military and all of the other positions of social domination will be controlled by those of the genetically enhanced group, under whose orders the genetically inferior will work at low-productivity, low-wage jobs. Is this the future? ♦

(© IPS) (Rodrigo Borja was president of Ecuador from 1988-1992.)

BRIEFS

Fiji may pay price for coup

Ever since George Speight, a failed businessman-turned-populist demagogue, launched an armed coup against the elected, Indian-led government in May racial violence has swept Fiji. Last week's negotiated end to the ensuing hostage siege, the appointment of a new president, and the creation of a nationalist-minded cabinet has done little to reduce tensions.

With the country split demographically by 56 percent to 44 percent between indigenous Fijians and Indians, close cooperation between the two groups would seem to be necessary and unavoidable. Fiji's hard-won 1997 multiracial constitution did indeed provide a framework for power-sharing.

But that document, along with credible democratic rule, trust and goodwill, has been wilfully destroyed by Speight's and his supporters' arrogant insistence on racial dominance and by the unsavoury, unwise complicity of the tribal chiefs and the military.

Ratu Josefa Iloilo, the new president, describes himself as "dedicated to promoting national unity and encouraging moderation, inclusiveness, consideration and compassion for all in our country". But his prime minister, Laisenia Qarase, who has usurped the position rightfully held by the deposed Mahendra Chaudhry, gives the lie to such utterances.

Along with the political, social, and human damage, the economic bill grows daily. Australia and New Zealand, are appalled that Speight's constitutional vandalism has been officially rewarded, have finally fulfilled their threat to impose trade, aid, sporting and diplomatic sanctions. The Commonwealth, and other aid donors like the EU, may have no option but to follow suit. ♦

(The Guardian)

After Elian, monkey custody battle

Like Elian, the six-year-old Cuban boy finally sent home from the US after seven months of bureaucratic and political wrangling, Cookie's loving, adoptive family want to hang on to "their baby".

Like Elian, Cookie, also six, eats ice cream, watches television and is the centre of attention whenever the family leaves home. And, in common with Elian, the authorities say that her protectors must allow Cookie to leave for a more appropriate home. But there is a crucial difference between Cookie and Elian: She is a Cercopithecus diana, or rare diana monkey.

"So what if Cookie is a monkey," said Inna Flikshtein, of Manhattan Beach, New York. "She is part of this family. They want to take the baby from the mother. But she will die without us and we will die if we give her up."

The state's department of environmental conservation says that Cookie is a member of an endangered species and must go to the Detroit zoo. The family's appeal against a court ruling to that effect failed and Cookie could be removed at any time, even though the Flikshteins threaten to barricade their home against a raid.

The couple bought the monkey from a pet shop for U$ 4,500 - neither they nor the dealer was apparently aware of Cookie's rarity. Dr Shirley McGreal, chairwoman of the International Primate Protection League, said: "This couple may think they love the animal, but they're misguided. If I were that monkey, I'd want to join the other monkeys in Detroit." ♦ *(dpa)*

Skilled visas for Britain

BRITISH Home Office ministers are studying a Canadian scheme which would enable more economic migrants with professional and specialist skills to work in Britain as part of a possible shake-up of immigration laws.

The immigration minister, Barbara Roche, said the government believed it was time to start a debate on finding ways to meet "legitimate desires to migrate" to Britain and called for an "imaginative rethink" of existing immigration rules so migration could meet economic and social needs.

It is thought that ministers are more inclined to an extension of the current overseas workers scheme which enables some specialists in shortage occupations to work in Britain rather than a major relaxation of the 1971 Immigration Act which effectively bans primary immigration.

The Home Office is believed to be looking at a limited version of the Canadian scheme under which 200,000 migrants will enter Canada this year.

The Canadian scheme enables professionals and skilled workers to get a permanent resident visa in Canada even if they do not have a job offer from a prospective employer. To qualify, a potential migrant has to have a minimum of 70 points based on occupation, education and training, experience, age and knowledge of English and French. For example, those who are between 21 and 44 get a maximum of 10 points but those under 18 or over 48 get zero for age. A university degree ranks as 16 points, a validated job offer 10 points, personal suitability based on an interview up to 10 points, five points for a relative in Canada and so on. ♦ *(Observer)*

Endangered vultures

There are no advertising campaigns in the international press, and no attractive pictures with donation forms underneath.

Yet Britain's Endangered Wildlife Trust describes them as "one of the most persecuted groups of animals". They are vultures, in particular, the Cape Vulture of southern Africa, which is fed poisoned carcasses, entangled in electricity pylons and shot for sport.

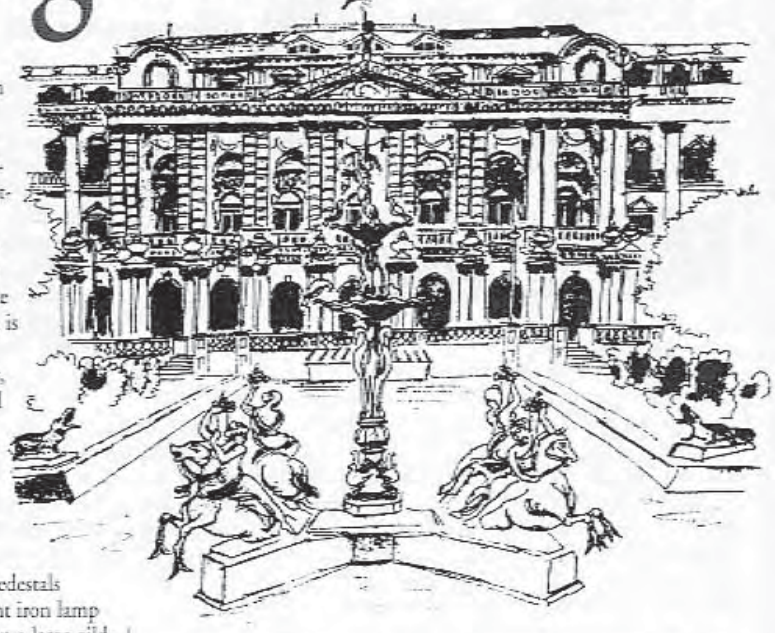
Peter Benchley, the author of Jaws, knows very well what it's like to lobby on behalf of a beast that no one feels fondly for. Earlier this month, he launched a campaign to save the shark. To raise support for the stricken species, he had to reinvent it: overnight, the generic Jaws changed from aggressive predator to a curious, if not cuddly, big fish, in the hope that someone would care.

We don't care about vultures for one simple reason. We can't make them seem to be like us. They don't talk, like it is claimed dolphins do. You cannot adopt one, like you can a whale. Ironically, we're only interested in saving animals if we can turn them into homo sapiens. If an animal is merely an animal, we're not interested in it at all. ♦ *(The Guardian)*

SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

The greatest building of them all



Visitors to Kathmandu are invariably told that the great Rana palaces that rise like huge wedding cakes above the lesser confections of the city, were designed by French or British architects. Certainly they emulate the grand classical styles of Europe and are completely unlike the traditional Newari architecture - of the Kathmandu valley. What comes as a surprise is to discover that the 'French' and 'British' architects were Nepali, foremost among them the amazing brothers Kumar and Kishore Narshing, who were responsible for almost every palace of consequence in the valley. How they could have turned so easily, so conversantly, to this completely foreign style is remarkable, particularly as every palace they raised, either singly or together, had a distinct character of its own.

When the first Rana prime minister, Jung Bahadur journeyed to England and the Continent in 1850, he was deeply impressed not only by the extravagance of court life, the awesome military pageantry, and the personalities he met, like Queen Victoria and the Duke of Wellington, but by the lifestyle that centred about the great houses. Returning to Nepal he soon set about introducing the fashions of Europe into the Nepalese court. Military uniforms became flamboyantly Puritarian, ladies of the court adopted Western hairstyles and wore their sarees in amazing approximation to crinolines and bustle. And modern palaces Were built employing all the embellishments of Corinthian and Rococco, Baroque, and neo-Gothic, high renaissance and Empire, and happily, an undeniable touch of Nepali. Singha Durbar has it all: Corinthian, Rococco, Baroque, high renaissance and Empire, and an undeniable Nepaliness.

Having piled their extravagances all over the cities of Kathmandu and Patan, the Ranas' dream of raising the ultimate great palace as an official residence for the prime minister crystallized in the mind of Prime Minister Chandra Sumsher Jung Bahadur Rana who ordered work to begin in 1901. Acres of land had to be levelled, for what was to be a building of almost 1,800 rooms with well appointed parks and gardens all around. The rooms were built around seven courtyards, which beginning behind the magnificent façade, slowly - diminished in importance. Here, in this amazing building considered to be the largest in Asia if not in all the world, lived the reigning maharaja, his numerous children and their families, retainers of various ranks, concubines and servants.- Since retainers had retainers and concubines had servants of their own, there had to be a provision for them all.

The Singha Durbar palace is reached through imposing gates 'in the French style,' and up a drive beside reflecting pools in which fountain nymphs desport themselves. Bronze alligators yawn ominously on the banks of the pool, and pigeons forever preen themselves in silver painted iron. Great pillars, wreathed with plaster flowers, rise two floors above the ample porch which is itself embellished with foliated pillars, decorative urns and a marble balustrade. When one's eyes finally come to rest after exploring tiers of pillared galleries, arches, decorated pedestals and trees of wrought iron lamp bearers, it focuses on a large gilded lion, rampant, which holds aloft the national flag.

Singha Durbar facade today, showing the elegant water nymphs in the front pond.

MN BAJRACHARYA

But if the outside is overpowering, the interior is incredible. I remember the grand marble stairway, the huge murals of the tiger hunt, when the prime minister was flung from his howdah to stand eye to eye in tall grass with a maddened tiger until rescued by his elephant. Gilt, priceless marble, Venetian mirrors, bohemian - chandeliers, paintings and statuary are everywhere. Then, quite unexpectedly and uproariously is a hall of distorted mirrors as if it was felt necessary to include a touch of comic relief among such magnificence I leave it to Percival Langdon, friend of the Then ruling maharaja and author of a couple of the most fascinating books on Nepal, to describe 'the experience of shock' in seeing the great receprion hall for the first time:

Its rich decoration may seem to many too rich; but it is only right to say that there is not in all India a hall of such magnificence. One wonders how all these enormous minors, these statues, these chandeliers of branching crystal, were brought over the mountain passes of Sisagarhi and Chandragiri. The heaviest pieces ever carried over are said to be the statues of the prime ministers. They weigh about four tons each….

There is a grand theatre, the Baithak Gallery, now used for sessions of the Rashtriya Panchayat. I have seen the overpowering Durbar Hall with its crystal chandeliers almost touching the crystal fountains that legend has playing champagne, used for banquets to President Rajendra Prasad and Queen Elizabeth. There could have been no more glittering occasions, as what jewelled detail had been omitted in the decor was more than amply made up for by the jewellery of the guests. It was incredible to know that all the sumptuous food being served in relays by livened servants was being cooked on charcoal fires on a back verandah by Boris and his Hotel Royal staff, since the palace kitchen was miles away.

I remember visiting various government departments in days gone by when one entered, I think, the second courtyard through a side gate hung with the most tangled confusion of electric wires. It was a difficult job finding the room one wanted in that maze of corridors, all hung with skeins of electric wires. I recall someone once telling me that it was amazing the whole thing didn't go up in smoke. It did, in 1974, though the cause is still unknown. All Kathmandu turned out to watch and try to put out the flames that relentlessly devoured the buildings. Many wept.

By the timely command of the present king, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah, a part of the doomed building was dynamited to save the historic façade. It worked. And painstaking rebuilding has resulted in a new courtyard being erected behind the first. Others may follow. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from In the Kingdom of the Gods, *HarperCollins 1999)*

BOOK REVIEW

by ANDREW RUSSELL

Understanding the Kiratas

Politics of Culture: a Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas
by T.B. Subba
Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1999
NRs 256

Precisely which groups represent the Kirata is still open to debate. Kiratas ruled the Kathmandu valley for over 1000 years, until their overthrow by the Licchavis in the 6th century AD. However, as Subba cautions, "there is serious difficulty in ascertaining whether or not the present Kiratas have a traceable descent from those mentioned in the ancient Aryan literature" (p. 22).

Subba's contemporary focus is on the three Tibeto-Burman groups from eastern Nepal that are unquestionably part of the present Kiratas, namely the Limbu, Rai and Yakkha. Using a variety of appropriate research methods, Subba delineates the Kirata world and the growing sense of Kirata identity within it. In-depth fieldwork in three villages in East Nepal conducted in 1992 and 1993 is supplemented by Subba's knowledge of Kirata in Darjeeling and Sikkim, based on previous research and, doubtless, his own experience as a Kirata growing up in Kalimpong (he is now Professor of Anthropology at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong).

Rais and Limbus are very much part of the Nepali demographic landscape, but few readers are likely to be acquainted with the numerically smaller Yakkha. Subba performs a useful service in placing this and the other two groups firmly on the Kirata ethnic 'map'.

Politics of Culture is also a study of nascent 'nationalism' among a marginalised, pluralist and dispersed cultural group. For Subba, "culture is not an independent or isolated symbol in harmonious equilibrium with another culture but...a system in constant conflict within and with other cultures for better appropriation of the available resources of a state" (p. 4).

Amongst the Kirata in India, for example, despite the social, economic and educational advantages of the region compared to Nepal, "exposure to various ideas and ideologies, greater interdependence with other cultures, lack of grip over one's traditional beliefs and customs, and the relatively secular state have all been responsible for the lesser enthusiasm and competence of the people of this region than those of Nepal as regards the politics of culture" (p. 21).

Today, however, throughout the eastern Himalaya we can see "a mushrooming of organisations which seek to preserve and develop their indigenous culture, language and religion" (p. 1). Subba profiles 12 such organisations (three in Darjeeling, four in Sikkim and five in Nepal), which illustrate the different ways Kirata 'nationalism' has been developing in these settings. "While the Tagadhari category representing the Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetri castes constitutes an objective entity, the essentialised Kirata, Janajati or Mongol identity is yet to evolve fully as its anti-thesis.

The people designated as 'Kiratas' here are yet to crystallise their ideology and culture. They still seem to vacillate between the relatively single and simple delineations such as the Limbu or Khambu [Rai] and the more compound and complex characterisations like Kirata, Janajati or Mongol" (p. 3).

There are historical and contemporary tensions between Tagadharis and Kiratas, evidenced in the racist comments of the Sikkim-based Taghadari Suraksha Samaj in 1992 that Taghadari alone "have the brain and the brawn to rule; others are meant to be at their feet, ruled for ever because they have emerged from the feet of Brahma" (p. 121).

In this vein, Subba criticises some Nepali scholars for carrying "the burden of legitimising the state and justifying that the migration of the Aryans into the Kirata or other Mongoloid habitats was legitimate and had no negative consequences" (pp. 69-70). From that vantage point, they have criticised Western anthropologists for emphasising the differences and conflicts between the two groups and for ignoring their interdependence. This, argues Subba, is an example of how shared elements of culture can become significant when the power of the dominant group is threatened.

The overall theme of the book is that the analysis of culture can never be divorced from the social, political and economic contexts of its production and representation, while proving convincingly the value of in-depth comparative historical and anthropological methods in making such an analysis. Professor Subba is to be congratulated for a cogent and path-breaking contribution to Kirata studies. ♦

(Andrew Russell, a lecturer with the Department of Anthropology, University of Durham, UK, has conducted research among the Yakkha in eastern Nepal.)

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepal U-17 bowled out

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Nepal's under-17 cricket team has been bowled out of the ICC Under-17 Asia Cup that was held in Pakistan last week.

Ten teams from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Singapore, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia took part in the tournament organised by the International Cricket Committee (ICC) to promote cricket in the lesser developed countries of Asia, including those where cricket has just taken root.

In the first game played between Kuwait and Nepal in Karachi, Nepal lost by 7 wickets. Nepal went in to bat first after winning the toss. But they were all out in 28.3 overs, having scored a total of 79 runs which Kuwait easily bettered in 26.3 overs, losing only three wickets.

The second day proved luckier for the disheartened Nepali team. Winning the toss again, the Nepal team wisely decided to field first. The opposing team from Bahrain disastrously lost 7 wickets for 32 runs in 19 overs. No batsman other than Rizwan Abdul Ghani was able to score more then 5 runs.

Ghani was run out after scoring a much-needed 15 runs. Bahrain lost all wickets for a measly 42 runs in 23.4 overs. Monik Shrestha and Prakash Sharma held off the Bahrain bowling until Prakash was bowled out. Then Prem Chaudhary joined Shrestha and carried the team to an easy victory of 44 for 1 in 10.1 overs.

The third game with Bangladesh proved to be a humiliation for the inexperienced Nepalis. Bangladeshi Mohammad Ashraful proved too stubborn to be bowled out and continued pushing ahead although the Nepalis used everything in their power. Ashraful was finally run out after scoring an inexhaustible 102 runs in 131 balls.

Bangladesh ended the game with an almost unreachable total of 225 runs with only four wickets lost. Faced with a target of 226 runs the Nepali team didn't make a good start. They lost both openers Monik Shrestha and Sagar Pant within the 18th run. By the first 20 overs Nepal had already lost 4 wickets with only 41 runs to their credit. And within the next 20 overs the whole team was out for 82 runs.

It wasn't over yet for Nepal. In the next game with Pakistan, the Nepali team batted first but couldn't get off the ground. Four wickets were sacrificed with only 14 runs.

The Pakistani bowling had the entire Nepali squad out within 28.5 overs for just 67 runs. The only noteworthy play came from Amit Shrestha, who faced 58 balls to score a hope-raising 23 which included two fours. The Pakistanis performed stunningly, and reached the target of 69 within 15 overs for no loss of wicket. ♦

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Four records broken

Four national athletics records were broken in the two-day National Open Athletic Tournament held 15-16 July in the Dashrath Rangashala in Kathmandu. There were 424 participants from all over the country in a total of 24 events organised by the Nepal Amateur Athletics Association. The main objective was to select the best athletes for the upcoming Asian Athletics Championships to be held in Jakarta and more importantly for the Sydney Olympics due to start in September.

Man Bir Joshi's 10-year-old national record of 4 min 7.70 sec in the men's junior 1500 m race was broken by Bet Bahadur Bhandari who shaved 1.52 sec off the previous timing. Similarly, Ram Krishna Chaudhary of Mahendra Police Club (MPC) set a new national record of 10.55 sec in the men's 100 m dash. A new record was also established in the men's triple jump by Sitaram Chaudhary with a leap of 15.10 m. Meanwhile, in the women's events, Samigya Shakya narrowly beat the national women's junior 100 m race record of 12.83 sec by 0.01 sec.

Cyber-protests target Olympics

Sydney - A diverse series of protests coordinated over the Internet threatens to disrupt the opening of the Olympics in Sydney this September, saying the games are an embodiment of the excesses of global capitalism.

Internet activists are passing on the tactics and techniques developed during the successful cyber-protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle last year and against the World Bank in Washington in April.

The Sydney Alternative Media Centre, which is being launched this week, is the latest radical Australian website modelled on those used to plan and publicise the protests in Seattle and Washington.

The parliament of New South Wales has passed a raft of temporary laws to attempt to keep tight control of the Olympic stadiums. But the control of cyberspace may prove more difficult.

Groups including aborigines, anarchists and local people protesting about recent rent increases, as landlords cash in on the anticipated 340,000 tourists visiting the city for the Games, plan to use the internet to help organise an unauthorised demonstration during the opening ceremony on 15 September.

Four days before that, ambitious "S-11" demonstrations against a World Economic Forum meeting in Melbourne will provide a test for many anti-capitalist activists—and for the Australian police.

Meanwhile, activist sites are urging protesters to target many of the Olympic sponsors, including Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Unilever and IBM. And it was reported last week that hackers also plan to sabotage the official Olympic website, which has three servers in the US and one in Australia.

"The International Olympic Committee is the final stage of corporate evolution," said an activist. "They don't produce anything, they redirect local resources to further their own ends, they ignore the needs of the global citizenry and they use the corporate media to distribute their aims." (dpa)

No to weapons at Olympics

Sydney - Security guards flanking foreign athletes at the Sydney Olympics will not be allowed to carry guns, Australian officials insisted Thursday.

"As a matter of policy we won't allow foreign security forces to bring arms into Australia. We have in this country very sophisticated law enforcement agencies. We can handle this ourselves," Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said.

The policy statement followed claims by the Israel wire news agency that in May the Australian authorities had agreed to turn a blind eye to arms carried by Israeli security agents guarding the Jewish state's Olympic team.

There are believed to be 12 countries that have asked for a waiver so that they can bring guns along to protect their athletes.

The ban was reinforced by New South Wales Police Commissioner Peter Ryan, the officer directly responsible for security at an event now just two months away.

"The responsibility for the protection of high-profile Olympic visitors and teams rests with the New South Wales Police Service," Ryan said, noting that at meetings next week with representatives from 32 nations, security protocols would be laid out. (dpa)

Afghan footballers play in long pants

Football has become complicated under the Taliban. While they are known to be fierce adversaries in many fields, on the football field Afghans tend to play very carefully—you could almost say fearfully.

Afghan football is still in its infancy. During the last 20 years of jihad against the Soviet Army, youngsters were shown how to use Kalashnikovs rather than the offside trap. However, whenever a football match is announced, fans in Kandahar—only male fans—rush round to the football field.

Clapping, whistling and singing are considered music and are therefore forbidden so players are encouraged to greater heights with calls of "Allah-u-akbar"—"God is great"—as required by Islamic law. Shari'a law also requires players to be properly attired. Male arms and legs may not be displayed, this could cause the crowd to entertain lewd thoughts. Teams take to the field therefore in heavy training suits, even in the merciless blaze of summer. The only concession is that turbans, normally obligatory, may be left behind in the dressing room.

A team from Pakistan recently visited Kandahar and, in all innocence, trotted out on to the pitch sporting their usual strips—shorts, short-sleeved shirts and all. The game had started and was in full swing when suddenly a member of the "Order the Good and Ban the Bad" committee—as the guardians of Afghanistan's public morals are known—rushed on to the pitch armed with a ploughshare.

Brandishing his weapon, he proceeded to arrest the entire Pakistani team, including substitutes. He delivered them into custody whereupon his fellow guardians reached for their razors. As a punishment for taking to the football field improperly dressed, the heads of the guests from the neighbouring country were shaved. The whole squad was then sent back home.

COURTESY JANA AVAHAN WEEKLY

SUDHIR SHARMA

SUDHIR SHARMA

Four districts in Maoist hands

SUDHIR SHARMA

As the police withdraw from vulnerable forward bases, the Maoists are moving in to fill the vacuum in four western districts: Rolpa, Rukum, Jajarkot and Salyan.

The police strategy now is to concentrate their forces in ilaka (area) police fortresses. Rukum, for instance, used to have 23 police stations, now the number is down to six. In Jajarkot there are only six from the earlier 15, and in Rolpa the number is down to eight from 39.

It used to be that the police ruled by day and the Maoists by night. No longer so. Now Maoists roam through villages in broad daylight. "I tell my police force to go into the village only when a villager has asked for help. During such times they go by helicopter and come back as soon as their work is over," says Parsuram Aryal, the chief district officer (CDO) of Rukum.

Elected representatives who were provided security by the police and won the local elections unopposed have become the main targets of Maoists.

The secretaries of many village development committees (VDCs) of Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan and Jajarkot have fled to the relative safety of the district headquarters in Liwang (Rolpa), Musikot (Rukum), Khalanga (Jajarkot), and Khalanga (Salyan).

Having moved in to fill the gap left by the police, the Maoists are now engaged in establishing *jansatta* (people's rule). They have formed Village People's Committees (VPCs) parallel to the VDCs. Besides Maoists, activists of the CPN (UML), the Nepali Congress, RPP and even some VDC officials have been included in these committees.

The acronym VPC is now as widely used as VDC used to be. The VPCs are implementing the Maoist agenda such as the introduction of a "revolutionary economic system", setting up cooperative banks, curbing gambing and the production of alcohol, formulating new marriage acts, and mobilising the community in agriculture, and in building roads, bridges and water supply systems.

General Secretary of CPN (Maoist) Comrade Prachanda says the four districts will be the "base area" of this group's activities. According to the Maoists, in a base area, the government withers away, and a new people-oriented authority takes its place.

Talking to local villagers, it becomes clear that police excesses are responsible for pushing many people into the Maoist fold. "The government has forced us to become Maoists," said Bir Bahadur K.C. of Khara in Rukum, whose house was burnt down by the police.

Even the police now admit that last year's offensive against the Maoists, codenamed "Kilo Sierra Two", could only hold back the Maoists. Ultimately, the brutality of the operation backfired on the police since it strengthened the people's sympathy for the Maoists.

Today, the police are on the defensive. There have been more than 800 ambushes on police patrols, and one deputy superintendent of police, six inspectors, and more than 200 policemen have been killed. Some 400 guns have also been lost to the Maoists.

Deputy Inspector General of Police Rajendra Bahadur Singh, the police commander for the mid-western development region, complains that the police lack both weapons and numbers. The police have had to make to with vintage 303 rifles, and it is only recently that the army has begun providing them with automatic weapons.

The police are also not trained in guerrilla warfare and counterattack tactics. The existing special force of 250 policemen is too small to fight the Maoists effectively.

Since 17 July the army has been conducting a 45-day training for 100 policemen in counter-insurgency and jungle warfare. But police officials concede this is too little too late. ♦

SUDHIR SHARMA

Clockwise, from far left:

Open meeting called by Maoists in Rangsi village of Rolpa.

Maoist militia taking oath at the martyrs' memorial in Chaurjhari.

Jajarkot: policeman standing guard outside the office of the chief district officer.

Hari Bahadur Pun seen here with his wife and child. Pun had taken refuge at the district headquarters after being targetted by the Maoists. But his wife has since gone back to the village upon instructions from the Maoists.

showing his Nepali Congress identity card is Nar Bahadur Khadka of Khara, where the police incinerated more than 65 houses and killed 15 people in February earlier this year.

(Adapted from a longer article that appeared in *Himal Khabarpatrika*.)

SUDHIR SHARMA

DIG Singh

Police chess

Interview with DIG Rajendra Bahadur Singh

Q.Isn't it a sign of weakness that many police posts have been removed from Maoist-affected areas?

A. It is not that. The situation is different. Earlier, we could allot only ten policemen to a post, but now police posts have been set up in places where they are likely to be more effective. It is like playing chess. If tomorrow the need arise, the post will be moved to another place.

Q. *Nowadays Maoists have become very aggressive. Does this mean they have become stronger?*

A. There are reports that they have become powerful in areas where the police posts have been removed. But their attacking off-duty policemen does not mean they have become stronger.

Q. *But it is said that the Maoists are now ready to announce their base area?*

A. I don't know what 'base area' area means. Does establish ing a base area mean frightening and threatening unarmed, innocent villagers, and pronouncing death sen tences on them?

Maoist guerillas performing the deuda dance. Note the 303 rifle snatched from the police slung over one of them.

Maobadi Sena

SUDHIR SHARMA AND **SHARAD K.C.**

We went looking for the Nepali People's Army in the forests, a five-hour walk from Khalanga, and when we met up with them, the Commander agreed to talk to us informally and as long as he was not named.

"We do not attack anyone unnecessarily just because that person is a police officer. Action is taken against keeping in mind his performance in the past," he said. The Commander said his group had now decided to scale down the killings, and concentrate on development work.

There are three types of Maobadi fighters: the People's Army soldiers, the security force and the militia. The soldiers wear army-type camouflage fatigues, while the security force (the Maoist policemen) is clad in olive green.

The Maoist fighting force has grown in strength from squad to platoon to temporary company. Every Maoist guerilla receives a monthly stipend of Rs 150 to buy toiletries. They are allowed a month-long leave every year. That is when they meet up with family and friends. Some of them even take the overnight bus to spend time in Kathmandu.

The Maoists seem to make the most of everything. They ended up interviewing us, the interviewers. They wanted to know what we thought of the People's War, if we viewed it as politics or terrorism. While taking leave, the commander shook hands firmly and said in his soft voice:"I don't know when I will die. So maybe we will not meet again. But don't worry, our party will now meet with journalists regularly."

SUDHIR SHARMA

Lt Col Gurung

Army road

The army has now moved into areas known as Maoist-affected. At first villagers would run away from them, but they now view the army as their friend.

The soldiers roam the villages, unconcerned and unarmed. Sometimes, they runs into Maoists but both go their different ways.

The army says their mission is not to fight Maoists but to build a road. The army has been building the Salyan-Musikot road for the last 14 months and the Maoists have not hindered their work.

The army is using incentives to win the hearts of local people. Rather than brandish weapons, it has provided medicines, water pipes, and roofs for schools. That is why the people trust them more than the police.

The army says it is because of police action that villagers sympathise with the Maoists. Villages with army camps are less affected by police brutality.

"We were three kilometres away when the Khara incident happened. The police would probably not have dared to carry out the attack if we had been nearer," says Lieutenant Colonel Jag Bahadur Gurung, the commanding officer.

ABOUT TOWN

Films

❖ **Foreign**
Bringing out the Dead. Kathmandu Mini Vision (226169, ext 512)
Un Coeur En Hiver. Directed by Claude SAULET. Big screen showing at Alliance Francaise, Thapathali. 6:00 pm. Free entrance. Tel: 241-163.

❖ **Nepali**
Dharmaputra. Bishwojyoti (221837), Nava Durga (610760)
Nata Ragatko. Heera Ratna, Ranjana (221191)

❖ **Hindi**
Bicchoo. Jai Nepal (411014), Manakamana (225284)
Jungle. Guna (520668), Kumari (414932)
Biwi No 2. Krishna (470090)
Kunwara. Tara(476092,491703)
Refugee. Gopi (470090)

Health/Meditation/Retreats

❖ ***Teachings and meditation.*** One-day workshop at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. Kamaladi. 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 pm, Wednesday and Saturday. Tel: 221-875.

❖ ***Guided meditation.*** Free programme of guided meditation at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Kamaladi. 6:00 p.m. onwards, Thursday. Tel: 221-875

Music

❖ ***Classical guitar*** by Kishore Gurung at the Chimney, Yak & Yeti Hotel. Call 248-999. 8:00 p.m. onwards, Thursday-Saturday
❖ ***Blues Live Band*** at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. 2:00 p.m. onwards, Saturday. Tel: 416-071.
❖ ***The Jazz Commission*** playing live at the Harlem Restaurant & Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti Road from 7:30 to 11:00 p.m.
❖ ***Las Kus Unplugged*** live unplugged performance by Sabu Lama at Las Kus Restaurant Courtyard, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 6:30 p.m. onwards. Tel: 413-632
❖ ***Local Saarangi Music*** with buffet dinner at the Nepalese Kitchen, Thamel. 6:00 to 9:30 p.m. Wednesday and Friday
❖ ***Live piano/Drums/Double Bass by Bidaprithi Trio band.*** Every day except Mondays at the Juneli Bar, Hotel De l' Annapurna, Durbar Marg. 7:00 to 9:30 p.m.
❖ ***Live Music by Robin 'N' Looza*** at the Bamboo Club,Thamel. Wednesday and Friday

Exhibitions

❖ ***Confluence.*** An exhibition of installation art by Binod Shrestha and Sujan Chitrakar. Curated by Preeti Joseph. 24–31 July. Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal.
❖ ***Figurative Emotions on Canvas.*** Paintings of Erina Tamrakar on display at Radisson Gallery, Radisson Hotel. 24 hrs.
❖ ***Photographs on display.*** Works of nature-travel photographer Bill Chapman on display at The Himalayan Light Gallery, Pilgrims Book House, Kupondole
❖ ***Slide Show*** on the wildlife adventures in Nepal and the lifestyle culture. Admission & Drinks free. Ultimate Descents, North Field Cafe, Thamel. Tel: 419-295,6:00 p.m. onwards, Wednesday and Saturday.

For inclusion in this listing send info to editors@nepalitimes.com or call 544641.

Chariot of ire

After the Rato Machhendranath toppled over in Patan, a round of recriminations begins over whether it was an accident or faulty construction.

SUJATA TULADHAR

The last day of its two-month journey around Patan, the Rato Machhendranath chariot had only another 30 metres to go. Unfortunately, one of the guide ropes caught itself on an overhead transformer next to Nepal Grindlays Bank at Jawalakhel and tipped the chariot over.

No one was hurt, but the accident led the superstitious to predict calamities for the country, and the pragmatists to look for ways to put the chariot right again.

Rato Machhendranath, or Bungdeo, is worshipped as the god of harvest and it is believed incidents like this can lead to crises like drought or destruction of crops. A Rato Machhendranath priest, or *panaju*, Kapil Bajracharya, is firmly in the pragmatist camp. He says: "It is only when a well-built chariot collapses that the consequences are terrible. This time everybody knew that the chariot was not strong enough." Bajracharya blames the Guthi Sansthan for low-quality timber. "The wood was not good enough and the cane (which when soaked is used as ropes for binding) was not holding the frames tightly. Inside the chariot, it was so congested that it felt like I was in a jail."

An investigation team has concluded that it was indeed an accident. Lalitpur Guthi Branch Office, Taa Baha, says a knot on one of the ropes called 'jungla' attached to the pinnacle of the chariot got entangled on a transformer pole. Since this rope was attached to the back of the chariot, the people pulling the chariot from the front failed to notice it, and yanked the chariot off its moorings.

Yagya Ratna Shakya, another panaju of the Rato Machhendranath said: "This is not the first time the Rato Machhendranath chariot has collapsed. But previously, the journey used to be safe and sound at least up to Sundhara. This time, the chariot started tilting from the very initial stage of the journey, from Pulchowk itself." This problem was taken care of with minor repairs when the chariot rested at Thati Tol for two months before continuing the journey to Jawalakhel Chowk. Pundari K.C., the head of Lalitpur Guthi Branch Office says: "I am more satisfied with the materials we provided this year than ever before. The collapse could be due to some technical problem but definitely not because of the materials."

Laxmi Maya Maharjan, member of Ward No. 3 added: "People are making up a mountain out of nothing. It was an unfortunate accident. We are getting cranes big enough to straighten the chariot so that the yatra can be completed as soon as possible."

The Guthi Sansthan spent an estimated Rs 1.3-1.4 million this year to build the 25-ton chariot. Myths apart, the collapse of the chariot almost every year shows that the quality of craftsmanship that goes into the making the chariot is getting deteriorating.

Babu Raja Maharjan, a craftsman who worked on the chariot said: "This time, the chariot had enough raw materials but there was a shortage of workers. Young people do not want to learn the skill and it is all up to us old men to do it." ♦

HAPPENINGS

DINESH SHRESTHA

Prime Minister Girija Koirala arrives for the launch of Nepali Times and is greeted by (from l to r) editor, Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia directors, Rajib Raj Bhandari, Sanjib Raj Bhandari and Himal Khabarpatrika editor, Kanak Mani Dixit.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

MPs Subhas Nemwang (UML), Hom Nath Dahal (NC) and prime ministerial adviser, Puranjan Acharya at the Nepali Times launch.

SAUL SUBEDI

Comedians Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bangsa Acharya pose with the Number One issue of Nepali Times.

FILM REVIEW

by Shanuj V.C.

Cool demons

Jungle: *Directed by Ram Gopal Varma. Fardeen Khan, Urmila Matondkar*

All ye diehard Bollywood haters, go sulk. Hindi movies have seen dakus of all whiskers, but the bad guys who stalk this Ram Gopal Varma movie, are zanier, scarier, and more real than all of them put together.

The story is a take on the exploits of the South Indian smuggler-dacoit-at-large, Veerappan. They say he sometimes crosses over to Bangalore from his jungle kingdom, and so if he chooses to see what Bollywood has done with him, his response would be worth knowing. Of course, the hero-heroine love story is all there, the songs too. But director Ram Gopal Varma is one freak case in a Hindi film world too full of cheese. Varma's movies, Satya as a strong example, don't often come off that Bollywood assembly-line which has been doing serious damage to our psyche.

The amount of havoc wreaked by the combined force of matrimonial and Fair and Lovely ads and Bollywood, is there for all to see in India. Why Varma has to be hyped, and this is important, is that he shows us the enormous possibilities of the Hindi movie. He doesn't stick to the formula that makes most Bollywood flicks so sick.

Varma too may be in the business of selling dreams, but his realism is what gets you. There's this scene in Jungle of holidayers on a safari—'typical' Indian group, a Sikh couple, Bengali honeymooners, kids, a foreigner too, a lot of racket, complaints about not spotting a lion (to which the guide retorts that lions don't have a time-table)...and you just know that movie-watching is great fun.

And the dakus are savage, intense and hilarious (an Indian reviewer calls them "cool demons"). You should see them discuss the method of a kill—"you hold this part, you the other", as if they were putting up a banner or something.

The Veerappan you get to know is called Durga Narayan Chaudhary, a name as far away from the real-life villain's Dravidian origins, and neither does he have the Veerapan-patented handlebar moustache. Durga is unkempt, likes to stare through his hair, speaks not too coherently, and likes this city girl (Urmila Matondkar whom he has taken hostage).

All along, Vijay Arora's camera is a marvel, surreally caressing the silence and noise of the jungle. That is another reason why this movie is immensely watchable.

But then you might ask, what's so watchable about a movie that has a cliff-hanging scene at the climax. Now come on, let's forgive Varma on that one. And actually, it doesn't look that contrived. When you have the audience wildly cheering at the end of it all, it surely becomes a great movie experience. ♦

OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by PADAM GHALEY

Gosainkunda

There are out-of-the-way places that no one goes to and there are out-of-the-way places that everyone goes to. Gosainkunda during the monsoon is one place you may think is off everyone's list, but you will be mistaken if you go there this month looking for wilderness, nature, silence and solitude. For a whole week beginning a few days before 15 August, Kathmandu pilgrims will clamber up the slippery slopes from Dhunche to the holy lake of Gosainkunda. Most of them

will look less like pilgrims and more like Godavari picnickers, raucous and uncouth.

But among them you will see the truly devout, many of them old and infirm, climbing to the lakes at 4,000 metres to take a holy dip. The placid and freezing waters of the lakes are considered the source of the watery plume above Lord Shiva's head, and a symbol of all that is holy in the Hindu way of life. Many will be sick with altitude sickness and turn back.

Gosainkunda has suddenly become less arduous because of what is optimistically called a "road" to Dhunche. At the moment of going to press, the road had been washed off by a landslide in two places, so pilgrims this year will have to trudge up from Trisuli itself—like they used to before the road to the Tibetan border was built.

After the exhausting bus ride to Trisuli (six hours from Kathmandu with the present condition of the road) you may be tempted put off the walking for the next day. But my advice would be to get as high as you can above the hot and humid valley floor. Two days later you will arrive in Dhunche—one of those Nepali mountain villages whose old world, pre-highway charm has been grotesquely obliterated by the arrival of the road. Dhunche has a wild west look about it. But instead of gold, it is the road head for the lead and zinc mines on Ganesh Himal, and the gateway to Langtang National Park.

Most of the trekkers you see will be heading up to Langtang, but you take the steep road that climbs through the pine forests towards Gosainkunda. The really fit have been known to make it in one day. But you may want to take it easy and break the journey half-way up—especially if the monsoon clouds decide to break in the late afternoon and give you a breathtaking view of the Ganesh range.

The forests are alive with birds, butterflies and the forest floor is sprinkled with monsoon flowers. (Watch out for leeches though.) If you get there before the pilgrims arrive, Gosainkunda itself will be so tranquil, and the dip so invigorating, that you feel holy even if you are not a Hindu. From here you have three options: take the same road down to Dhunche, follow the wild and exploratory route northeast towards Langtang Valley, or head down to Kathmandu through Ghopte Bhir, Tharepati, Helambu and Sundarijal in two days.

Whatever you do, the holy tingling on your skin from the dip at Gosainkunda will clear your soul and stay with you for a long time. ♦

YOUR WEEK

by KARUNA MAYA

ARIES 21 March - 19 April
Take the lead, get your team organised, get going on long-term projects. Take it easy through the end of this week. Help those in need. Use your charisma to your advantage.

TAURUS 20 April - 20 May
Keep happy, don't lose your sense of humour, laugh it off. Spend time with those close to you this weekend. Share your mind. Write things down, organise yourself so you don't feel lost.

GEMINI 21 May - 21 June
Big changes are afoot. Keep an open mind for radical new ideas. Be creative. Restlessness during weekend, but just let your expressions show. Writing, painting, music—they'll all leave you feeling much more centred and fulfilled.

CANCER 22 June - 22 July
You have keen sensitivity and intuition. Hone them this weekend and don't plan things too much. Your drive may intensify, avoid conflict. Wait for past efforts to bear results. New experiences will appeal to your sense of adventure.

LEO 23 July - 22 August
Let go of your ego for now. Listen with an open, flexible mind and work together. Rely on your instincts on financial decisions this week. Go out dancing or do something else equally energetic.

VIRGO 23 August - 22 Sept
Try out new ways of doing things. Experiment with new strategies in your work. Try not to be a perfectionist, it might not be good for friendships. Try not to be too ethnocentric. Go for new things, turn a new leaf.

LIBRA 23 Sept - 23 Oct
Admiring glances will come your way this week. If you are single, romance is in the air. If you are not single, watch out. Look for the intellectual spark, lay on the charm. This weekend may be overloaded, ease up a bit on plans. Relax.

SCORPIO 24 Oct - 21 Nov
Look around before you take a leap. Be careful of things beyond your control. Bright prospects for your career. You will earn more freedom at work and play. Curb jealous tendencies. You'll find plenty of reason to celebrate, so try to avoid emotional outbursts.

SAGITTARIUS 22 Nov-21 Dec
If you are feeling reclusive, don't worry. Things will start picking up. There will be plenty of opportunity this week to let yourself go, and engage in creative pursuits. You will be a hit with your creativity and style. Things are looking up on the romance side.

CAPRICON 22 Dec - 19 Jan
Maybe you need to curb your euphoria a bit. Risky schemes will be catching up with you. Rely on your reliable conservative side and it'll get you through. Catch up on domestic repairs. Things are looking up on relationships.

AQUARIUS 20 Jan - 18 Feb
This is a week for excitement. Your charm and brilliance will attract people to you. Be more expressive, share your ideas. You will have a new admirer with whom you will share intellectual affinity. Artistic pursuits will be stimulated.

PISCES 19 Feb - 20 March
Try not to go solo. Work with friends and colleagues. Bounce ideas off them, and sort out the viable from the unrealistic. Fun and excitement are in the air. Indulge your every whim. Feel spontaneous. Visit new places and go on a voyage of self-discovery.

NEPALI WEATHER

Another extensive low-pressure circulation is hovering over Bangladesh and will be making its way to the Himalaya in a northwesterly direction to reach eastern Nepal by the weekend. The current monsoon pulse over central Nepal will give way to a few days of heavy rain till the middle of next week. Rains will then ease off as the monsoon takes a breather.

Kathmandu

Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
29-19°C	30-20°C	31-21°C	31-21°C	29-19°C	30-20°C	31-21°C

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FIRST

Funny Side Up

by Kunda Dixit

Garbage in, garbage out

Now that the villagers at Kathmandu's only landfill site have once more stopped refusing our refuse, city streets are garbage-free again. That's a pity. Many of us here had got quite used to the stuff, and we really miss it.

No more can we conveniently give people directions on how to get to Nepali Times by telling them to follow the smell to the bus park and turn left at the garbage pile.

In a city without house numbers, rubbish heaps have become visual and olfactory landmarks to navigate by. At night, after putting the last page to bed, it is the fragrant beacon of our favourite neighbourhood dump that points the way home.

After studying them closely, we now know that no two rubbish heaps are alike. Ours has a certain delicate bouquet of fruity fermentation recalling an odour halfway between a mature gorgonzola and the smell of a freshly-cut toe nail. We don't know what gives it this distinctive tang, but it must have something to do with the momo shop down the road that uses our dump to discard entrails of deceased water buffaloes and ex-chickens.

There is a mound at Thamel which some say is stronger than ours. What rot! On a scale of one to ten, our rubbish dump measures 8.5 on the open-ended Richter scale, and theirs is only 8.0 since it lacks the essence of all great garbage which is pulverised water buffalo viscera.

Garbage dumps also encourage biodiversity. Ours is a repository of endangered species of plant and animal life. If it weren't for the litter they would surely have gone the way of the dodo. Take the fiercely territorial Greater Himalayan Dingo of which we have a resident alpha male with a harem of five females. The fellow is highly possessive, and won't let any motorcycle near when he is gnawing at his favourite femur.

The heap also supports all manner of birdlife like the Dark-rumped Eurasian Scimitar Crow, which is now only found in Kathmandu's garbage heaps. If the rubbish is cleared, this precious natural heritage will disappear—a loss not only to Nepal but to the planet at large.

The Hotel Association seems to think garbage is bad for tourism. Utter rubbish. Just yesterday, we observed a group of Japanese tourists posing for a photograph in front of our heap. We can open souvenir stores on Durbar Marg with choice samples of Kathmandu junk: styrofoam necklaces, buffalo amulets, egg shell ear-

NEPALI SOCIETY

DIPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya on their return to Kathmandu last week from London after his annual health checkup. Also in the picture, from left: Chief Justice Keshav Prasad Upadhayay, Prime Minister Koirala, Prince Gyanendra, Crown Prince Dipendra and Prince Nirajan.

Clean bill of health for king

King Birendra is back from his annual health check-up at the Cromwell Hospital in London.

His Majesty had been admitted to the hospital for treatment last November after he suffered a mild heart attack. He was given an angioplasty which requires a medical check-up every six months. This method is effective as long as other healthy arteries do not get blocked.

Doctors involved in King Birendra's treatment found that one of the arteries was 90 percent blocked. Since the King was suffering a block in only one artery, the doctors had suggested angioplasty and not a coronary bypass that is needed for more serious patients.

After his latest check-up, the Royal Palace announced that His Majesty's condition was "satisfactory".

Grindlays DAL BHAT INDEX

In US$	Dal-Lentil 1 kg	Bhat-Rice 1 kg	Petrol 1 Litre	Diesel 1 Litre	Kerosene 1 Litre	Electricity 1 Unit	$ Rate
Bangladesh	0.79	0.39	0.43	0.23	0.39	0.04	50.85
Bhutan	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
India	0.67	0.38	0.59	0.29	0.14	0.06	44.80
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
Pakistan	0.68	0.39	0.56	0.34	0.18	0.08	70.95
Sri Lanka	0.46	0.48	0.57	0.25	0.13	0.04	52.29
Nepal	0.76	0.38	0.64	0.25	0.20	0.03	78.46

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