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EXCLUSIVE

Girija on CNN

Read an exclusive transcript of Prime Minister Girija Koirala on Riz Khan's Q&A show last week. Hear what he had to say on such diverse topics as corruption, nepotism, tourism and Maoism.

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Bye-bye Kodak

The prestigious US-India-Nepal joint venture, Kodak Nepal, is packing its bags to leave. The project, which had invested $6 million on its Hetauda plant, decided to quit after it was not issued a "certificate of origin" needed to export colour photographic paper to India duty-free, even though it had got initial approvals from both Nepal and India.

Kodak wrote to the government in late August for permission to leave. Among the high officials senior Kodak officials met in Nepal before reaching coming to a final decision were the Prime Minister, Minister of Commerce and Industry Ram Krishna Tamrakar and Ministry secretary, Mohan Dev Panta. But nothing came of this last-ditch effort.

Kodak had lobbied long and hard to get the export permit to India. The matter was even raised by Bill Clinton with the Indian prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, earlier this year. Kodak had hoped for something to emerge out of the scheduled meeting between Koirala and Vajpayee in New York last week.

Eastman Kodak Company of the US owns 80 percent of Kodak Nepal, the rest is held by Kodak India.

Kodak now plans to dismantle the factory and move on.

Expensive Olympics

The Sydney Olympics is going to cost the Nepali taxpayer at least Rs 12.2 million. It could have been a lot less if only the five athletes and the coaches had gone to Australia. However, a retinue of 21 officials have also tagged along for a junket down under. The athletes are also livid that their daily allowance is less than that of the officials *page 16*

Peace in pieces

Everyone agrees there can't be a military solution to the Maoist problem. But peace efforts only get lip service as both sides sharpen their knives.

BINOD BHATTARAI WITH SHIVA GAUNLE

This is how violently destructive civil wars begin: when hardliners call the shots, vested interests benefit from an escalation of violence, and those who call for a negotiated settlement are not taken seriously.

Peace is on everyone's lips: they're just not doing much about it. One politician more than any other has staked his political career on peace: Sher Bahadur Deuba. But he is caught in a web of intrigue within his own party, and can't make his move. "The talks are now at a standstill," Deuba admitted to us in a candid interview.

It has been a year since then-PM Krishna Prasad Bhattarai gave his protégé the mandate to seek a negotiated solution, and put him in charge of a peace commission. There were a flurry of chits between him and Maoist leader Comrade Prachanda, then for the past four months: nothing.

The Maoists are really not in a big hurry to talk. They have already made their political point by stating their willingness to negotiate, even as they plan for their post-monsoon offensives. For its part, the government is spending Rs 6 billion to raise a paramilitary police force and deploy new weapons. It wants to wield a bigger stick before agreeing to sit down.

Off stage, factions within the Nepali Congress are busy with some serious backstabbing in the run-up to their party convention in January. A Deuba coming up with some peace breakthroughs could upset their plans. Neither Deuba nor his party chief, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, are good communicators at the best of times. These days, they only talk to each other through their media mouthpieces.

All this confusion has worked well for the Maoists who have spent the past few weeks making their presence felt in the capital with some pipe bombs. Though the bangs were magnified many times over by the media, the rebels did succeed in sending a loud message: that they were capable of hitting even the Valley if they so wanted.

Most of Deuba's early spadework has now been wasted. He had got Prachanda to agree to talk in return for minimum conditions: make public the whereabouts of Maoists arrested by police, release those jailed for insurgency and call off the police offensive. Recalls Deuba: "Prachanda was not only willing to talk, but also to call off all action during the talks. I believed him, although I can't tell what was behind his willingness."

The government claims it has done its bit: the talks have the sanction of both the executive body of the ruling party and the government, and says it has already released over 100 rebels from jail, including Dev Gurung, a central committee member of the CPN (Maoist). But the Maoists have not responded to Deuba's latest call for talks, made through a statement in late August.

"I don't think they are satisfied," says the Kathmandu-based editor of a weekly close to the Maoists. "They want the specific whereabouts of at least three senior leaders, Dinesh Sharma, Danda Pani Neupane and Matrika Yadav."

The government's response has been muddled. Ministers have even questioned Deuba's mandate, and threatened to disband the peace commission. Koirala himself needles Deuba at every opportunity for failing to resolve the crisis despite all necessary authorisation provided. Deuba says he still has access to Prachanda if needed, but it is evident that he'll have to start from square one even if the party gives him a real go-ahead.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Sher Bahadur Deuba walks past a toothless lion guarding Basantpur Durbar

If the Maoists were showing off their pipe bombs in Kathmandu, the government has been trying to show its presence in Rolpa and Rukum. Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel has just returned from a two-week tour. He told us: "The government is clear on talks, as a democratic party, for us dialogue is a conviction, not a strategy."

Poudel has been trying to sell the government's development package for the insurgency-hit districts, and faults the Maoists with not being serious about talks. "They have not stopped terrorising the masses, they blame the government for everything. They are using the talk of talks as a strategy, not a way to resolve the crisis."

One political analyst who has been following the Maoist strategy closely is Shyam Shrestha of the leftist *Mulyankan* magazine. He does not doubt that the Maoists were at first serious about talks. "It was the first time that they had shown any flexibility in the five years of their war," says Shrestha. "The proposed development package and armed police force may have led them to suspect the government's seriousness about talks," he adds.

Shrestha, however, does not rule out that the Maoists may have been buying time to consolidate their gains in their "base areas". "I don't think they ever believed they would attain the goal of the revolution through talks, but they needed the time."

All the Maoists had to do to score public relations points was appear serious about talks. Recently, they took the media on a tour of the regions under their command and got wide coverage of an open public meeting held on 26 August in Korchabang, Rolpa.

Meanwhile in the ruling party there are increasing signs of disarray. "The enemy is at the gates, but we don't seem to trust each other on how to deal with it," a source close to Deuba said. "By fighting each other, we have shown them our soft underbelly, and given them more confidence."

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That is also the message the Congress party is giving to other opposition parties. Among them the UML has taken a vacillating love-you-hate-you position vis-à-vis the Maoists. The object apparently is to keep damage—which have not been very high with the UML compared to other parties—at present levels. But the party is well aware of how the insurgency is being handled.

UML's Subash Nemwang says: "The Deuba commission is confused, it does not seem to know if it should hold talks, nor does it seem to have a clear goal." ♦

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NEPALI Times

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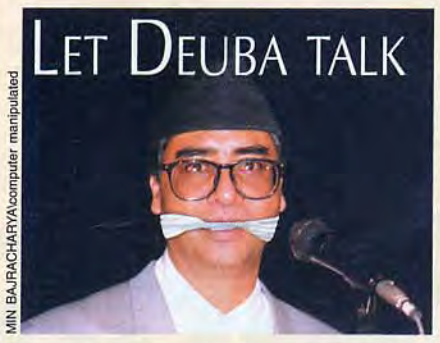
NEPALI Times
NEPAL'S TOP NEWSPAPER

LET DEUBA TALK



MIN BAJRACHARYA/computer manipulated

The Army wants more men, the Police wants automatic weapons. Maoists have what they want: child recruits and deadly pipe bombs. None of them seem to have any concern for what the rest of us want: peace.

This is certainly a 'People's War'. It is the people who die, it is the people who are maimed, driven out of their homes, not the Maoist leaders, not the police chiefs, not the generals and ministers. That is why no one talks about talks anymore. Except for Sher Bahadur Deuba, shouting all by himself in the corner: "I want to talk, I want to talk."

But no one lets him. Even within his own party, there is now rivalry among leaders to bag the big prize of resolving the Maoist insurgency. There are those who want to do it militarily, others want to go for negotiations. But only so long as they themselves get the credit. And the Maoists? They don't care either way, their revolution is moving along just fine at its own inexorable pace.

Sher Bahadur heads the task force formed by the Nepali Congress to hold talks with the Maoists. It was Krishna Prasad Bhattarai who formed that commission, but Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has been keeping it on a tight leash, threatening to disband it every so often. So Deuba (and the prospect of talks) are stuck. The government says 'OK, let's talk', but it is reluctant to specify what it wants to discuss.

Neither are the Maoists too eager to commit themselves to anything. In the killing fields of Rukum and Rolpa, Gorkha and Sindhuli, neither side has scored military victories dramatic enough to be cashed in at the negotiating table. So, they reason, why talk?

This is all the more sad. The government loses nothing if Sher Bahadur succeeds in engaging the Maoists. Koirala should realise that if the talks are indeed successful, as prime minister, he can reap more out of the peace dividend than can Sher Bahadur. But he obviously does not want to take the chance of Sher Bahadur bringing the fighting to an end and growing in political stature far above any Nepali leader of his generation. What a small price to pay to safeguard democracy, ensure the nation's survival, end this pointless bloodshed and (incidentally) foster a better political future for a senile party on the verge of disintegration. But politics being the cynical game it is, the protagonists clearly don't think so.

For the Maoists, too, talking to the government does not mean an end of the struggle. After all, it was Chou en-Lai, the trusted lieutenant of the great helmsman, who made the little-known quote of Clausewitz's world famous: "All diplomacy is continuation of war by other means." However misguided their turn to violence may be, the Maoists leadership does have as its core value an end to oppression and neglect.

A quick military victory is impossible for either side, so even the most optimistic Maoist will readily agree that it may be pragmatic to have a fallback option in case talks allow them to continue the political struggle. It has happened in other countries. Senior government functionaries argue that talks will sap the morale of an already demoralised police force who are in the line of fire. Lame excuse, and false bravado. Talking does not mean capitulation. Keeping the law and making peace are not necessarily contradictory. The approach has to be not "either/or" but "either/or else".

Our appeal to Girija Koirala and Prachanda is very simple: give peace a chance. You have nothing to lose. The people have had enough of this profane war.

LOOK, NO LUNGS!

There used to be a time when Tundikhel was reputed to be Asia's biggest parade ground. Oh, well. That's like saying we had the world's tallest dwarf. But look at what we did to Tundikhel. First we axed the magnificent and historic *khari* tree in the middle. Then the army carved it up, and they discontinued the great tradition of the cannon boom at high noon. At the other end, a kitschy park came up. There wasn't much to brag about Tundikhel anymore. Starting this week, there is even less. Tundikhel this week is hosting a Kathmandu Utsav, a Dasain shopping mall in a tent, and over on the other side, the World Hindu Federation is holding a *havana* in another huge circus tent. Aside from being potential fire hazards, these giant bamboo and canvas contraptions have taken away the one last bit of open space that Kathmandu had.

It seems like we abhor open space, we hate grass, we detest oxygen. So if there is an "empty" spot anywhere, we quickly cover it up with an Officer's Club. And then we block the only sensible shortcut from Maiti Ghar up to Tundikhel, announcing it with a hideous billboard sponsored by a lubricant manufacturer. Welcome to Asia's messiest parade ground!

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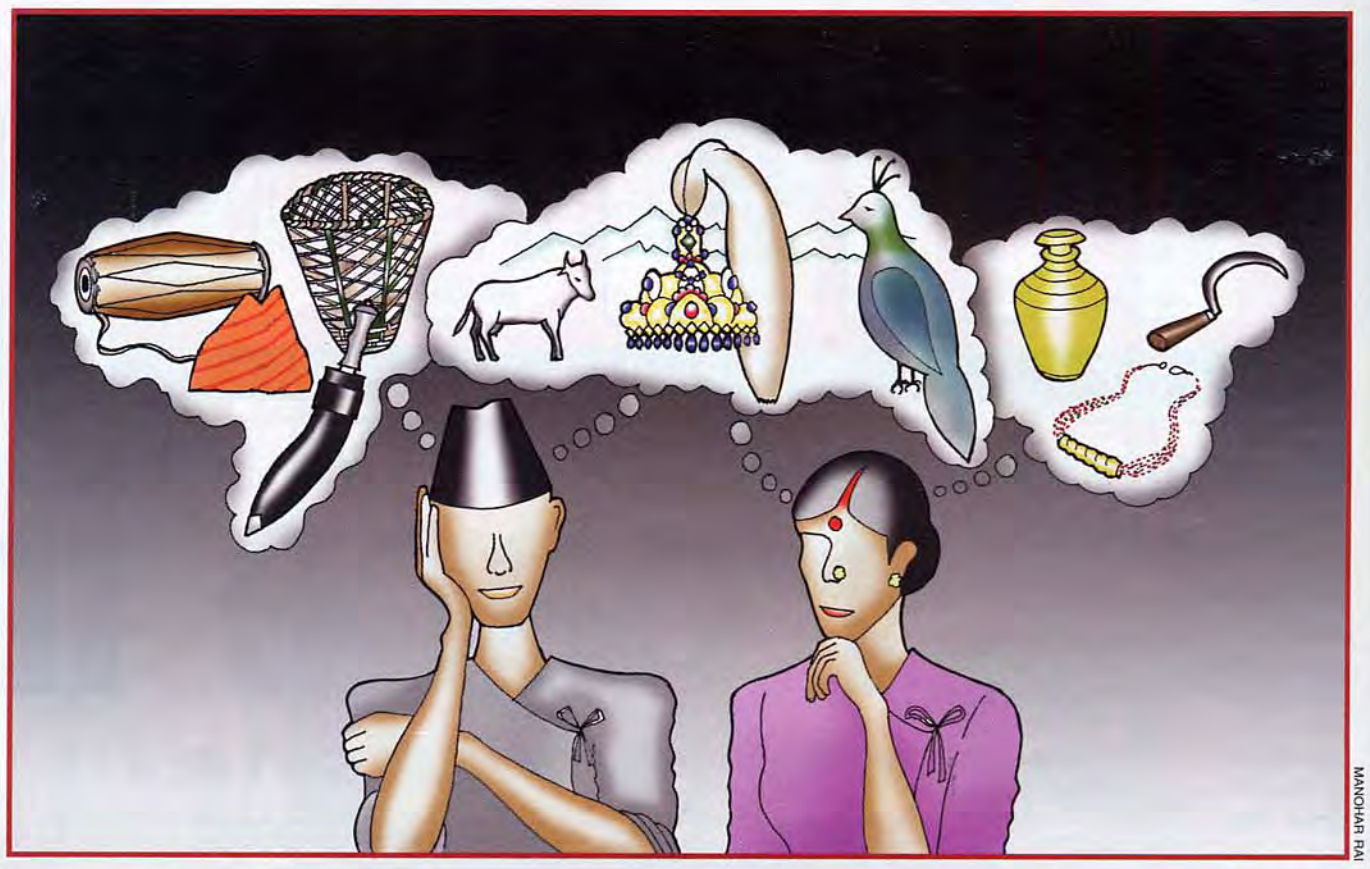


MANOHAR RAI

STATE OF THE STATE

by C.K.LAL

My patriotism is purer than yours

It's flag-waving time, and the Olympics is as good a time as any to take a long hard look at patriotism.

People in power everywhere like to play on patriotism. In this game, allegiance to the symbol of power is flaunted by players and spectators alike. In Nepal, if you do not wave the flag in a particular way you are a traitor.

There are those here who believe that Nationalism is an end in itself. No matter that we don't have much to show for ourselves as a nation, and immigration officers around the world treat us with naked contempt. Doesn't matter, we tell ourselves, we're proud to be Nepalis. Anyone who asks: "Excuse me, but what is there to be proud of?" is immediately declared a 'non-nationalist' (during the Panchayat days, the chosen adjective was 'anti-national') by the self-appointed guardians of nationalism.

Someone once said: "Patriotism is love of one's country, nationalism is hatred of all others." What exactly constitutes Nepali nationalism? Nepal is a sovereign country, but it's yet to become an integrated nation, as B.P. Koirala once admitted. The process of creation of a real composite national identity really started only in 1990, when the new *Constitution of The Kingdom of Nepal* was promulgated, and sovereignty was for the first time vested in the Nepali people. Prior to that, what we had in the name of nationalism was servitude to hereditary rulers.

Nepal's present territorial contour resulted from the clash of two ambitious powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when the gunpowder of British India prevailed over the khukri of the House of Gorkha. Nepal promptly became a pawn in the Great Game. National unification was a rosy simplification of history airbrushed by latter-day court-historians.

Gorkha rulers fought fierce and often bloody battles to annex territories. Prithvi Narayan Shah shifted his base from an impoverished Gorkha to a safer and more prosperous Kathmandu. Like any other invader, he expropriated the resources of conquered fiefdoms and distributed them among his nobles, some of whose descendants helped create the myth of unification.

From the time of King Prithvi Narayan Shah till the overthrow of Ranas in 1951, Nepali nationalism had only one dimension—blind loyalty to the Crown, whether worn by the Shah kings, or the Rana prime ministers. You owed your life and livelihood to the Maharaja (*dhiraj*), and you were duty bound to be loyal to him, his kith and kin, and the superior officers appointed by him.

King Mahendra discovered the usefulness of devotion once again when he assumed absolute powers through his royal coup in the winter of 1960. The chant once more put ruler above country. There are some in Nepal today for whom this sequence still holds true. In an apparent extension of Mao's dictum that religion is the opiate of the masses, King Mahendra turned Nepali nationalism into an even stronger sedative: it kept democratic aspirations of the people asleep for three decades.

The problem arises because the very idea of nationalism is vacuous. Any ruler who has used its hollow slogans will tell you that. Historically, nationalism has always been the favourite riding horse of tyrants and tin-pot dictators through the ages. "Nazi", after all, comes from the German word "Nationalsozialismuz".

Even democratic countries like India and Sri Lanka often whip up nationalistic fervour to silence subordinate minorities.

In his oft-quoted book *From Empire to Nation*, Rupert Emerson argues that inhabitants of a country must "feel that they belong together in the double sense that they share deeply significant elements of a common heritage and that they have a common destiny for future". When such a sense of belonging does not exist, as in the case of Nepal, a common destiny needs to be fashioned as an ideal, and it should not be one based on an imagined past. The creation of such an identity is an accommodative process, it cannot be based on exclusivity for "us", and prejudice against "them".

Politics of identity is a dangerous game that can lead straight into the pit of civic strife. Instead of fabricating a past out of falsehood, it makes more sense to concentrate on the shared vision of a common future. Rather than flaunt one's ethnic purity a la George Speight, it's much safer to swear by a shared symbol of national unity such as our present Constitution.

Prithvi Narayan Shah made Nepal in the way he knew—by his sword. We must create a modern Nepal by methods more suited to our times: by fashioning a mosaic made of all ethnic aspirations. It is not a game to be played by desperately frustrated elements.

Let the likes of Janardan Acharya and Daman Nath Dhungana take a walk with their imagined fears of "Fiji-isation" of Nepal. Not only do they forget that quite a few of the "Indians" attacked by Speight's mobs were Fijian Nepalis, but they make the dangerous mistake of exaggerating an outside demographic threat to be seen as nationalists. As the popular Nepali proverb goes: the ghosts of the mind are scarier than those in the darkness. Fears need to be overcome, not feared. ♦

"The leaders are to blame for the Maoist problem"

Six Nepalis speak out on the Maoist problem, and none seems to favour the military option.

Sabrina Shrestha
student, Kathmandu

The root cause of the problem is nobody seems to actually approach it sensibly. Both the government and the Maoists should not have taken the path of violence. It seems both sides

are locked in a struggle of egos while the common people suffer.

Because people are ignorant and uneducated, many tend to give themselves easily to fear. And because of the fear, they either join the Maoists or raise a strong voice against them, and ask the government to use force. The use of force is not good. It provokes further instability.

The problem is of course getting bigger for the country. A dialogue has to begin as soon as possible and let social life get back to normal. Those living in the city may not be affected. But look at our brothers and sisters living a tough life in the villages. They are living in fear and insecurity. They have to be given relief, not only physical relief but also psychological. Students, especially girls, in villages are losing hope. You've got to take up arms if you don't have the political connections for better education and employment.

The leaders have lied many times to the people by giving them false hopes. They are to blame for the Maoist problem.

Rishikesh Ghimire
tour operator, Kapilvastu

I think the main cause of the Maoist problem is widespread poverty and lack of education because when democracy was established people had hopes and dreams that couldn't be fulfilled. This led some to believe that the way to solve this is to start a people's war. The leaders are also to blame for this situation. Leaders from all parties are to blame because they only think about their personal benefit rather then look at the

good of the nation.

Any country in the world that faces this type of problem, which is actually terrorism, uses the army to control it. Nepal is the only country in the world that is using the police. But the army should be mobilised only as a last resort because we know that once the army is sent it has a devastating effect, and can lead to a civil war-like situation. Both the government and the Maoists must realise that there is a lack of effort from both sides to solve the problem.

The problem is very critical. We in Kathmandu don't realise that the problem is very intense but outside Kathmandu the problem is at its peak.

Erica Adhikary
student, Kathmandu

The growing problem of the Maoist movement, especially at the societal level, needs to be solved as soon as possible. And there are ways apart from using force to do that. There is no need to use police force and the military. The government can sit down and talk with the Maoist leaders who now seem willing to talk.

We have seen a lot of changes in the government, but no one in power has really done anything to gain the trust of the Nepali people, let alone the Maoists. All parties are involved in serving their own interests than in hearing the voice of the people. In a poor country like Nepal, this issue has now become very important to look into sensibly. If the problem is not tackled in a peaceful way, who knows Nepal may be dragged into a civil war pretty soon.

Look at what is happening now, while the death toll rises on both sides, more and more youth are being forced into taking up arms. If there had been good education and planning in the country from the beginning, there would have been no need for a Maoist revolt.

Gokul Khadka
entrepreneur, Patan

Nepalis are very peace-loving people. I think all Nepalis should be assured of the fact that the Maoist problem will be sorted out in a peaceful manner. It's just a matter of time.

Because I think even as the Maoists fight for their ideology the government is also looking for ways to sort out things.

The reason why talks are not moving ahead is that there has been no real identification of the problem. The government might be trying its best to solve the problem and the Maoists might also be moving to reach an agreement, we don't know.

There is confusion about whether Maoists are fighting an ideological war or a violent war. They may be right in their own way but face-to-face talks have to take place and both sides, the government and the Maoists, have to halt the fighting. All wars end at the negotiating table.

Chitra Malla
entrepreneur, Kathmandu

There is a positive and negative side to everything. Democracy too has its pluses and minuses. I

think the Maoist problem started due to the dissatisfaction felt by the many people over governance and the state of the nation after democracy because people expected so much of democracy. Lack of education and widespread poverty helped light the fire.

Maoist leaders are highly intelligent people and only when they understand that violence will not help in achieving their goals will an end to this problem be possible. The government as well as the Maoists should sit down and talk. What is happening right now is that both parties are sticking to their stubborn demands and forgetting the people.

Sending the army will not help solve the problem because the problem is not just about winning the war against Maoists. All options have to be considered and looked into.

Nanda Sharan Devkota
student, Dolpo

The main cause of the Maoist problem is unemployment, poverty and lack of education. People from the villages turn to Maoism because they do not have food to eat or clothes to wear. They work hard but agricultural production is low. They are uneducated and can be led to do anything because they cannot think for themselves. The Maoist leaders were clever enough to understand this and exploited it accordingly.

It's going to very hard to solve the problem given its present situation. If the leaders in the government during the days when the problem was just budding had tried to understand

the problems of the people in the affected areas I think it would have been resolved a long time ago.

Although the situation is very bad the army should not be mobilised because once the army is sent in, the small-scale war going on now is going to erupt into something much bigger and more destruction and death will follow. If there are so many innocent deaths when the police is being sent what will happen once the army goes in? ♦

Interviews and pictures by Salil Subedi and Alok Tumbahangphey

LETTERS

THE DOLPOPA

Having recently visited Dolpo, I would like to add a few more things to Padam Ghaley's account (#8).

At least 10,000 people live at altitudes of up to 4,000 m in Dolpo—many more than in the Khumbu. Yet, they have no useful vaccine immunisation programmes. Boarding schools with the help of French and German nationals have been set up with dedicated Nepali teachers, but government schools present a sorry picture.

Besides the *Yarcha gompo* ("Himalayan viagra"), this area is an ethnobotanist's paradise. *Jattamasi* is just one of the useful medicinal plants which grow here. There is potential here for cultivating medicinal herbs in a big way to sell to countries like Taiwan and China where the consumption of these is highest.

Contrary to rumour mills, Maoists are not disturbing the peace at Lake Ringmo or in the upper Dolpo area. It is still the weather, and the beautiful but dangerous terrain which make Dolpo so magnificent and yet so inaccessible at the same time.

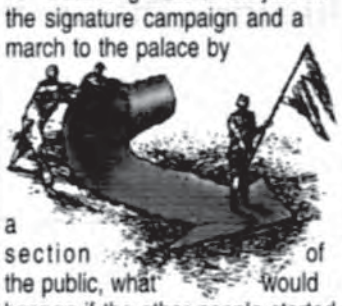
Ed Hillary made a positive impact in the livelihood of the Sherpa people of Solu Khumbu. People like Thinley (who starred in *Caravan*) ask: Will the Dolpopas too have to wait to be rescued by people like Eric Valli. Or will Nepalis be able to help themselves?

Buddha Basnyat, MD
Kathmandu

ANYTHING GOES

C.K. Lal is an excellent writer, but substituting rhetoric for facts turns his opinion into polemical ranting. Mr Lal has penned two articles on "Paras killed Praveen Gurung therefore monarchy is on the docks" theme (#5, 7) he has not taken the effort to tell the readers any facts about the death, accident or motive. Just shouting "the public is convinced" is not sufficient for conviction. Perhaps the facts do not suit Mr Lal's agenda?

If the king were to act just on the signature campaign and a march to the palace by



a section of the public, what would happen if the other people started taking a mob to the palace with the other demands? So let us be aware of what we ask for. Mr Lal says that in the past people were "forced to be loyal" or that truth was manu-factured. Nobody can ever be forced to be loyal, people became loyal voluntarily when the going was good.

Mr Lal need not look more royal than the royals by talking about the king's "real interests". Remember, when the facts were clearly established, it was the same king who, during the ancien regime, did not hesitate to punish not only his senior bureaucrats, police and army officers (who have been subsequently reinstated by the new democratic regime) but his youngest brother as well. That was without the persuasion of supposedly 500,000 signatures and a motley crowd trying to desperately recover political relevance by clutching on to a tragic accident. The act of royal justice and redressal is more than we can say for the present free-for-all, anything-goes regime.

When facts are clearly established beyond reasonable doubt about Paras' involvement, the king will act according to the best tradition of monarchical justice in Nepal—without fear of the mob or favour to his nephew. I remain, His Majesty's most humble "minion".

Mrigendra K. Devkota
Kathmandu

TIMES

I have been reading the articles published in nepalitimes.com on the web. This is just to compliment you on the great job all of you do at Nepali Times by writing on issues that were untouc-hable just a few years ago. Issues like the long overdue reality check for our royals and a message to the powerful smugglers that we indeed are watching what they are up to. Well, that in itself is no compliment because every journalist seems to be hammering them these days. However, the articles in your publication always stand out.

I want to give a special mention to your columnist C.K. Lal. He does an excellent job synthesising and analysing hot issue in depth. Congratulations on being one of the few news sources from Nepal with such consistently high quality and integrity.

Sushil Bogati
Seattle, USA

I have been reading Nepali Times from the first issue. After more than a decade spent in Nepal trying to make sense of what is happening, I feel so relieved to read material written by people who know that facts and words matter.

So please keep it that way; do not obscure the story with jargon. But do not simplify the issues either. Politics, society, environment, history are complex, it takes hard work to understand their linkages. I believe that Nepali Times is providing a reference and an example of intellectual discipline for Nepal's educated class.

Albert Grela
Kathmandu

"In Nepal empty stomach is

Prime Minister Girija Koirala appeared live on CNN's Q&A programme hosted by Riz Khan on 6 September which was broadcast only on the network's South Asia feed. During the interview, the Prime Minister fielded questions from a wide range of people from Nepal and abroad who sent in their questions either by phone or email. There was a simultaneous online live chat going on in cnn.com Nepali Times transcribed the interview for readers who missed the show

Riz Khan: Let me start by asking you. There is so much already on the UN's plate. What can Nepal hope to get out of this summit? What do you hope to achieve for your country?

My dear friend, this summit, I feel that United Nations should have a new vision for the future and also because the scientific and technological advancement and economic liberalisation throughout the world...

RK: But, sir, I was going to ask you this is an opportunity for you to meet some of the key leaders that may be hard to get hold of sometimes. What sideline meetings can you have? What can you achieve on the side perhaps that the main meeting won't...

I will focus on poverty alleviation because there are the wide gapping between haves and have-nots. The gap between the haves and have-nots have widened very much. In future, that will create security concerns to United Nations. That gap should be narrowed down by United Nations.

Sushil Bhattarai, Vietnam (email question): It seems you are guided by "kitchen" members of your cabinet. It seems you want to run politics as a family business. Can you clarify?

My dear friend, I'm not that kind of man who is influenced by the family members. I might hold opinion about Nepal, how to develop it. So, it is all nonsense to say that I am being surrounded by courtiers and my family members. It is wrong to see like that.

RK: What about issues of... I mean, you are accused of things like nepotism, corruption and so on. What are you doing to combat corruption in Nepal?

Well, when I took over power, three priorities I had made. Law and order situation was maintained, second to eradicate corruption and third good governance. I'm working on that line. And the corruption is an invisible enemy. It's very difficult to root out corruption. But I'm still trying my best to root out corruption. That's my first priority is to root out corruption. Then alone political stability will be maintained in Nepal.

Caller from India: Mr Prime Minister, I'd like to ask you... your government has been claiming that it is strictly against ISI and having any bases of ISI in Nepal. But evidences which have been claimed by the Indian authority that ISI has a strong base in Nepal and IC 814 hijacking to Kandahar was also performed from Kathmandu. So, what do you think ISI will be having its effect on India and Nepal relations?

Well, my dear friend, India government should pinpoint where ISI is. And another thing, I cannot throw stones in the darkness. So I've told India's Prime Minister Mr Vajpayee about it. Pinpoint where ISI is then we will be able to control this. Otherwise, it is just like throwing stone in the darkness.

Pria Pande, Kathmandu (email question): What have you done to alleviate the Maoist insurgency, as thousands have died in clashes. You created a task force. But what else?

To contain terrorist activities is multi-pronged strategy, one (unclear) through political consensus and second package programme, we are introducing economic programme to those areas through all party meeting and third, administrative labour. Fourthly I have been calling them for talks to come to the table for talks and for negotiations also. So, these (unclear) against terrorist activities.

> **'My dear friend, Ramesh, you don't know anything about the functions of the party. In democratic party, this kind of things happen, but it will not, the party will not break, it will not, this government will not fall...'**

John Fox (email question): You face a Maoist insurgency, troubles with Bhutan refugees, and boundary disputes with India. How are you able to tackle these issues all at once and get global action on them?

Well, as regards Bhutanese refugees, I have talked to the Bhutanese Prime Minister right now and I want to sort this matter bilaterally. But I think that without the good offices of India the problem will not be solved. During my visit to India I talked to the Prime Minister of India Mr Atal Behari Vajpayeeji about this. This time Mr Vajpayee is positive to resolve this problem.

RK: Prime Minister, let me ask you. Of course, Nepal doesn't make it to headlines all the time but news of attacks on tourists and the tourist industry may be affected... Let me ask you, how you might (unclear) confidence (unclear) of tourists in Nepal. In also bringing outside investment, especially when you have news of these Maoist rebels rising up spreading throughout the kingdom?

Well, we are very much concerned about Maoist terrorist activity. As regards the security and order for the tourists (unclear) we are proceeding towards that direction. We want that tourists should come to Nepal and see (unclear)

Ramesh (caller from India): I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether the government in Nepal would survive?

Whether the government will survive? What do you mean by that...my dear friend?

Ramesh: It means that there is a lot of friction between the earlier prime minister and the prime minister...

My dear friend, Ramesh, you don't know anything about the functions of the party. In democratic party, this kind of things happen, but it will not, the party will not break, it will not this government will not fall...

RK: If there was some sort of political stability, what sort of

ATTENTION OGB'S

All OGBs in Nepal please contact the Grahamites Association Nepal (GAN) for update on Centenary Celebrations.

The birthday celebration in Kathmandu will be held on September 16, 2000 at The Club, Bhatbhateni starting sharply at 6.30 pm. Do attend.

GAN meets every Wednesday at 5:30 pm at Deche-ling beer garden, Thamel (Ph: 412158)

GRAHAMITES ASSOCIATION NEPAL

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The tourists return

SALIL SUBEDI AND ALOK TUMBAHANGHPHEY

In his first floor bookstore overlooking the busiest street in Thamel, Paki is eagerly awaiting the arrival of the second tourist season of the year. "It's not that there are no buyers now, but there are too few of them," says the bookseller who has been in the business for the last two decades.

Parsuram Lama of Paradise Tours and Travels at Kantipath is busy clearing up credits with airlines. "We don't want to be bogged down by financial hassles during the season. If things are settled from the beginning, the season sales will run smoothly," he says, adding, with a touch of hope, "I don't think there will be much decline in the number of tourists this year."

As the monsoon comes to a sputtering end, for everyone involved in the tourist trade, from the barefoot hawker in Basantapur to the suave manager of a five-star establishment, from the 'private cab' driver hanging around Durbar Marg to the travel executive whiling away her time in an air-conditioned office, the waiting is finally over.

It has been a long year since the record hordes who arrived in Nepal last autumn. The spring season was pretty dismal, first with the Y2K scare and then the Indian Airlines hijack. And with the rains tourism came to a near-complete halt. That is why the oncoming season holds special significance for the industry.

There are reasons enough for hope and one is the increase in international flights to Kathmandu. Singapore Airlines and Gulf Air have announced additional flights and Hong Kong's Dragon Air is beginning twice-weekly flights. Says Ashok Pokhrel, president of PATA Nepal Chapter, "There isn't a negative trend in the flow but the growth is not phenomenal either. The industry still has the confidence although we did go through a pretty rough summer."

The number of tourist arrivals by air till the end of August this year was 215,153, which shows a decline compared to the 249,286 who arrived over the same period last year. The fallout of the December hijack is clear in the number of Indian visitors to Nepal, gone down by 34 percent this year.

This is not a healthy sign given the huge potential that exists in the Indian market, says Pokhrel. "Four million Indians travel abroad annually, and we get only about a hundred and fifty thousand of them. With an open border, easily usable currency and a culture and religion so much similar to their own, we should be flooded with them, but unfortunately few people in the travel trade sector see that," he says.

Regardless of the figures so far, there is anticipation in the air in Thamel. The 1sq km area with over 2000 business establishments is being spruced up. "We are trying to tackle various problems tourists face. There has been a lot of cases of credit card overcharging cases, selling of fake idols and crafts. Indian products are being sold as examples of Nepali craftsmanship. All these things affect Nepal's image," says Tejendra Nath Shrestha, president of Thamel Tourism Development Committee. "Apart from that, we are also serious about managing street hawkers, and providing security to visitors."

The Committee is planning to organise exhibitions and sales of Nepali industrial products, food festivals, street festivals and other tourist attractions. It is also working on standardising the rates for the growing number of Internet services centres and local groceries and bakeries, to discourage unhealthy competition.

devil's workshop"

support do you have, how much stability do you feel your country has politically?

Political stability, well, as regards Maoist terrorist activities, it has destabilised the country. But we are also taking very hard decisions about that. There will be political stability. Now as regards democracy, there is consensus between all the parties that democracy should be stable in Nepal. So, I'm getting all support from all parties to bring stability in the country. And I think in future there will be clear political stability in the country very soon.

to reason, so first of all the priority should go to the stomach. That's why we are giving first priority to improve our agriculture. And this year we are progressing very fast. In two or three years we will be self-sustained in agriculture.

RK: Now as you concentrate on agriculture Prime Minister, this limits the progress you could make in areas like the information technology and the IT sector...

...this time I visited Andhra Pradesh just to see the Information Technology and India has agreed to give support

"Once the Bhutanese refugees join hands with the terrorists, it will be a great headache to India, Nepal and Bhutan."

RK (referring to web chat): The economy is in trouble, population growth is still a problem, and agriculture production is dwindling. Please comment.

Well, economic, because our economy is not that sound. But recently we are managing to make our economy sound. And also as regards to agriculture we have focussed (unclear). I feel that there is a proverb in English 'Empty mind is devil's workshop'. But in Nepal empty stomach is devil's workshop. Empty stomach does not listen

to Information Technology in Nepal. I don't know about technical subjects but I want that this technology should be introduced in Nepal. So India is prepared to do that. I am very glad that India has given support for the information technology.

Surendra P. Pradhanang, Nepal (email question): Do you think Nepal should be allowed to trade with Bangladesh via Indian land, without any restrictions (given that Nepal is landlocked)?

The tragedy is that Nepal is a land locked country. But Nepal is also peace-loving country as well. It has fauna, high-mountains, Himalayas and there are lots of fauna and flora why tourists are attracted to come to Nepal. But because the land-locked country, that is the tragedy. With all the facilities that is the tragedy of landlocked country. But as regards Bangladesh, India has recently given us some points for entry to Bangladesh. That has also given some support to Nepal's economy.

Khawer Tabbani, Karachi (email question): Do you see Nepal playing any role in easing tensions between Pakistan and India?

Well, Nepal is a very small country, and there is a proverb in Hindi that: *choti muh badi baat* . If Nepal can speak and try to do something the big country may...will not appreciate it. But as for me, because I want that Pakistan and India should come to an understanding so that the whole South Asia should remain in peace. And mostly Nepal wants, being a peace-loving country, we want that there should be understanding between India and Pakistan.

Now this time I'm talking to Mr Prime Minister of India here in the United Nations. I will talk to him as regards the SAARC summit. And what I want that the SAARC summit, the process should be started through the technical meetings and also ministerial meetings. That will pave the way for SAARC summit in Kathmandu.

RK: How much of an impact, Prime Minister, is the issue of refugees having in Nepal. You have a large number of Bhutanese refugees that you have to attend to...

One hundred million Bhutanese refugees... one hundred thousand Bhutanese refugees. And they are very restive. I've talked to the Bhutanese Prime Minister this time also. Once they join hands with the terrorists, it will be a great headache to India, and Nepal and Bhutan as well. So, this problem should be settled by all the three parties together.

RK: Sir, just to end, there is the upcoming event. Your opposition and the Maoist insurgents are looking to host a nationwide strike. What do you expect to happen at the end of September, I think the 21st, when they're calling for basically a nationwide stoppage?

You know this kind of a hartal and strike goes on in Nepal. When the opposition becomes unreasonable, then this type of a strike and other things goes on. But, this doesn't matter to me. And the government will go ahead with its programme, economic and other programmes. ♦

Tour operators are hopeful that this season may not be as good as the previous year, but worries remain about long-term prospects. "This year we are expecting a moderate number of tourists, as usual. But the turnover for the coming years is unpredictable because of the rising political instability," says Shrestha.

The Maoist rebellion is certainly contributing to the reduction in tourists, especially since travel advisories put out by various Western countries have specifically highlighted the Maoist threat in Nepal. But there are other long-outstanding issues that has hindered the growth of the industry in Nepal. Says Narendra Vajaracharya, president of Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN), "After the resumption of the Indian Airlines flights we were quite hopeful but the statistics didn't live up to our hopes.

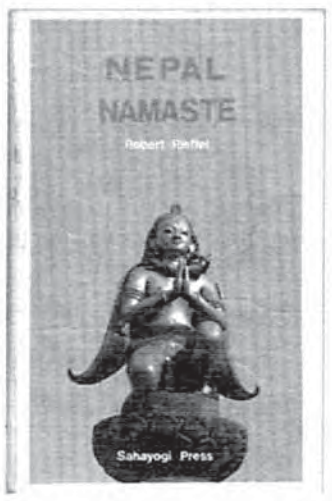
The biggest problem in all this is the inefficiency of the national flag carrier. HAN is seriously thinking of dumping RNAC and partnering with other international airlines in terms of promotion and marketing."

The Director of the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Pradeep Raj Pandey, however, sounds upbeat. "Even with its limited infrastructure and budget, NTB is trying its level best. And our efforts have been internationally appreciated. In India we have tried to project the image that we are not anti-Indian as was perceived during the IA hijacking. I think the marketing in India will definitely produce positive results."

One can only hope that for the sake of the country's tourism his optimism isn't misplaced. ♦

Robert Rieffel dead

Robert Rieffel, long-time Kathmandu resident and Nepal-lover, died last week in Maracaibo, Venezuela, at the age of 85. Rieffel first came to Nepal in 1961 for treks in the Himalaya. In 1970, he was designated general manager of Royal Nepal Airlines. That was when Air France was running the airline.



He stayed on in Nepal after his two-year stint at RNAC, authoring the classic tourist guidebook *Namaste Nepal* (Sahayogi Press 1990), which has also come out in French and Spanish. Later, he served as Belgium's Honorary Consul in Kathmandu.

Rieffel's wife was a dedicated social worker who died in Kathmandu in 1984. Rieffel was devastated by the loss. He later moved back to France and then on to Venezuela to live with his son, Mark. His son will bring his father's ashes to Kathmandu next month and will place it next to his mother's grave at the British cemetery in Kathmandu.

Born in Strasbourg, Robert Rieffel started his career as a correspondent for the news agency AFP in Eastern Europe during the Second World War. He was an avid mountain lover and had also written *With Zimba the Sherpa* and *What Do I Know About Nepal*. ♦

Drama at Miteri hospital

The police has come under fire from human rights organisations over their "unauthorised" entry into a Kathmandu hospital premises in search of two suspected Maoist rebels admitted to the hospital for gunshot injuries. The police entered the Miteri hospital in Baghbazar on 2 September, six days after two young patients had been brought it from Sindhuli, claiming that the duo matched the descriptions of Maoists being sought by the Sindhuli District Police. Speaking to us, both the wounded admitted they are associated with the Maoists. Rajan K.C. said he has been fighting the People's War since the very beginning, while Srijana Phuyal said she was a recent entrant into the Maoist fold. The two had been injured in clashes with the police on 23 August.

After the police entered the wards, the hospital's medical director, Dr Birendra Jhapali, went to court seeking an order to keep them out. On Thursday the Appellate Court of Lalitpur asked the police to refrain from actions that could affect the hospital's operations. The court has also ordered different government departments to clarify why the police had entered the hospital premises without necessary authorisation.

The petitioner also says that the police entered into the wards, disregarding hospital regulations and misbehaved with the staff and patients. The police deny the allegation, and also deny that they had prevented relatives of the injured from visiting them, as has been reported. They plan to take K.C. and Phuyal into custody after the treatment is over.

Reading literacy figures

How many people in Nepal can read and write down their names (that basically qualifies one as "literate")? Apparently in the maze of figures bandied about, no one can be sure, as could be seen on the occasion of International Literacy Day on 8 September.

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the National Planning Commission (NPC) figures based on a three-year-old survey conducted in 37 districts, puts national literacy at 52 percent. UNESCO says something else. According to its report for the year 2000, 32.8 percent Nepalis are literate.

The different findings arise from the different parameters used. While the government includes everyone above the age of six in its surveys, UNESCO does not count children below 15 years.

The UNDP reports adult literacy in its annual *Human Development Report*, and the figures for 1998 (the last available date), was 21.7 percent for females and 56.9 percent for males. This one is another mismatch with government numbers.

Functional literacy—that is how many can actually use literacy skills in everyday life—is something none of the statistics tell. Experts believe that could be lower than even what UNESCO reports.

DyPM tours Maoist districts

Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel visited the four mid-western districts most affected by the Maoist insurgency to try to seek support for a proposed "integrated development programme" the government wants to implement. Poudel's visit, limited to the safety of the district headquarters of Rukum, Rolpa, Kalikot and Salyan, was marked by promises of new roads and more money for development activities. He also used the occasion to highlight the virtues of democracy and of the Nepali Congress party.

"Fall Guy" for Paras released

The death of singer Praveen Gurung in a hit-and-run last month on 6 August has taken a new turn after police released Khadga Bahadur Bhujel, who had claimed responsibility for the accident. Bhujel was released after three weeks in custody. He was reportedly released under orders from the Home Ministry. The government decision came after it was reported that a letter from the Royal Palace to a leftist student leader said that King Birendra had sought details on the accident from the government.

The All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU) had spearheaded a campaign to collect over 500,000 signatures to petition King Birendra to take action against his nephew Paras Shah, who is alleged to have been at the wheel of the Pajero that hit Gurung. The ANNFSU and six other leftist organisations affiliated to the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) are now demanding that the government make public the details of the accident.

Public spending review

The government has named a five-member public expenditure review commission to report on how public spending can be improved and how resources can be properly allocated to the priority sectors. The commission is headed by Binaya Dhoj Chand, MP, Shanker Sharma, member of the National Planning Commission and three other government officials. The commission is to report to the government in six months.

UML blues

Budhabar, 6 September

Nepal Oli

The main opposition party, the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) has been holding workshops, seminars and meetings in different parts of the country. Party leader Madhav Kumar Nepal says that this is being done to strengthen the party's grip from the grassroots level to the national stage.

In the beginning, the deliberations are being held at the regional committee level, moving on to the districts, and then to the VDC, wards and block committees. All party members have been notified to attend these meetings. The performance of the various committees are being analysed—if the party is not functioning properly in a certain area, reasons are sought, with suggestions and recommendations forwarded to improve the situation.

Besides this, categorisation of all members will also take place. There's a drive on to increase membership, and new members will be familiarised with the way the party and its affiliates work. The party also wants to pick and choose when it comes to choosing appropriate people for appropriate places. The constituencies where the UML has failed to grow will come under special focus, and action will be taken against inefficient members and leaders.

New members are being attracted by stressing that the party is a significant player in national politics, and any weakening of its structure will have a negative effect on the life of the nation. Meanwhile, the party budgets for the districts, the VDCs and the ward levels are also being scrutinised. The UML, it seems, is getting serious.

Will the UML split?

Saptahik Bimarsa, 8 September

The visits and programmes of the ruling party in the Maoist-affected areas, have jolted the leaders of the UML out of their deep slumber. Opposition leader Madhav Kumar Nepal has started visiting these areas, and has stated that there is a certain amount of friendship between the Maoists and the UML.

While the government has asked for help from all political parties in solving the problem, the main opposition party's role appears dubious. On the one hand, it says the Maoists are their friends, and therefore have to be helped. On the other, the UML finds its cadres being attacked by the Maoists.

The internal strife in the UML is not helping matters. The tussle for leadership between Nepal and K.P. Oli is making the low-level cadres restive, and the war of words between Ishwor Pokhrel and Pradip Nepal is only adding to their discomfort. Both Nepal and Oli, in the name of strengthening grassroots cadre, are in fact straining at the leash to take over the leadership.

The feud between the top comrades will be on full display when the party's student's wing, the ANNFSU, holds its 15th convention in Butwal from 17 September. Oli is regarded as wielding considerable clout in the student wing, and Nepal will be all set to try and clip his wings. It was in Butwal that the ANNFSU held its 6th convention, where it split. A repeat maybe in the offing at the party level.

While Oli has considerable following among certain sections of the UML membership, including women, Nepal is facing rough weather in calling the shots. But Nepal has always had tricks up his sleeves, and has shown particular flair in turning decisions in his favour. So the stage is set for a classic showdown at the ANNFSU meet—Nepal leaving nothing unturned to get the students' backing, and Oli hopes to consolidate his standing. The confrontation will be all the more interesting when both men pitch for their own candidates to the ANNFSU top post.

If the UML is not to be struck by the Nepali Congress bug, it will have to get its act together. Its reckoning as a party of some national strength in many ways depends on how its students' meet goes.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Nowhere in the world has revolutionary change occured without (the people) having to pick up arms."

—*Bhakta Bahadur Shrestha, leftist leader, in* Nepali Patra weekly, *8 September.*

Budhabar, 6 August

"Enjoy life. You are no longer bonded labourers."

Fight for Congress party presidentship

Saptahik Bimarsa, 8 September

Two second generation leaders of the Nepali Congress—Shailaja Acharya and Sushil Koirala—have announced that they will be contesting for the post of party president during the forthcoming 10th Nepali Congress national convention, while a third, Sher Bahadur Deuba, is also on the verge of signing up.

While Shailaja Acharya had made her intentions clear two months ago, it was the turn of Sushil Koirala last week, but only after he added a rider—he shall contest only if the Prime Minister doesn't. Deuba, in the meantime, is consulting his advisers and supporters, and still has not made up his mind completely. Deuba knows only too well that he had once challenged Prime Minister Koirala and had come a cropper. Moreover, he was also one of the leaders in the dissatisfied camp who had challenged Koirala recently, and there too, had not been completely successful. They were successful to the extent that they got the national convention postponed, extracted a promise from Koirala that he would reshuffle the Congress Working Committee and Cabinet, but were unsuccessful in fulfilling their main demand, which was the issue of one person-one post.

Since the Prime Minister is out of the country, the reshuffling of the CWC and the Cabinet will be done only after he returns. The PM has not stated whether he will contest for party leadership or not, and has stated that this decision should be left to the party election committee.

Discontented party members want Deuba to throw his hat in the ring. But he realises that a majority of the party members are with Koirala, and weaning them over to his side is not at all easy. And if he contests, he has to make sure he wins.

Another point that works against Deuba is his handling of the Maoist issue. As the head of the committee to solve the Maoist problem, he has been far from successful. He has handed in his report but his opponents state that he did not even visit the affected areas while preparing this report. Plus the Deputy PM's recent visit to the affected areas has taken the wind out his sails. Agreed, the Deputy PM's purpose of visit and Deuba's handling of the Maoist problem may be completely different, but party members state that for his own benefit he too should have been there and not sitting in his office in Baneshwor and meeting his well-wishers and supporters.

Why attack schools ?

Jana Awahan, 8 September

This is the question that has left people perplexed. On 23 August, the Maoists attacked the Modern Indian School; on 31 August they took action against the principal of Arunodaya Boarding School; and on the same day, attacked Bishwa Gorkha Boarding School.

The Modern Indian School has four major shareholders—the father-son duo of Arun Saraf, shareholders in Hotel Yak and Yeti, the owner of Everest Hotel and Sardar Pritam Singh. The principal is a retired Indian army colonel named Ratnakar.

History and geography are taught in Hindi and the school song is the Indian national anthem. A small river flows besides the school compound, and the school has built small dams on the river, which has caused problems to the people of Lalitpur. (On an annual basis, one to two students drown in the river.) The school is said to have encroached on some neighbouring land too.

The school charges between Rs 2250 and Rs 2650 per month from each of its 1500 students, of whom only 50 percent are Nepali. The Maoists feel that the school is only for "commission agents and capitalists", and discriminates against Nepalis.

As for the Bishwa Gorkha School, the Maoists feel that the principal has been exploiting the students, teachers and other school staff, as also the neighbours on a regular basis. He flaunted his proximity to some political leaders regularly. The Maoists had asked him to show some regret and undergo self-criticism but he had refused. This was the reason for taking action against the principal of the school.

About Arunodaya Boarding School, people had taken out a procession demanding a reduction in school fees, holding cultural programmes, and ceasing the singing of the national anthem. The school management had a couple of people arrested for doing this. The principal used to flaunt his proximity to some political leaders and used to systematicly exploit people and students alike. It was against this sort of attitude that action was taken against the school.

Nepalis insulted

Nepali Patra, 8 September

Prime Minister Koirala is in New York to attend the UN Summit. A few days ago, he was on the CNN's Q&A program and because of the way he presented himself, a lot of Nepalis feel that he has insulted Nepal.

After watching the interview, one gets the feeling that the PM was unprepared, crude, not diplomatic at all, and not up to the mark. To a particular question concerning the bandh called by the left parties, he said that the opposition had no work and would not be able to affect him in any way. The leftists are livid and baying for his blood.

He also stated that a small country like Nepal would not be able to mediate properly in the India-Pakistan crisis. People are wondering, "Does size matter, or is it the proximity to the countries concerned that counts?"

Another point that has left the people disenchanted is the PM's poor English. If he is not fluent in that language, would it not have been better to have an interpreter? People feel that if he had one then he would not have made a fool of himself.

Nepal disgraced at UN

Chhalphal, 10 September

The Prime Minister at the UN Summit it seems has done more harm than good for the country. First of all, he insisted on speaking in English, a language in which he is not fluent at all. He went on to make a mess of himself. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari is fluent in English, still he spoke in Hindi and used an interpreter. Koirala ought to have used a Nepali interpreter.

He again stuck to speaking in English on the CNN's Q&A programme. When asked about the total number of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, he replied "hundred million". He should know that the number is hundred thousand. Koirala also didn't do his image or the country's any good, when he fumbled with the facts and figures concerning Nepal. Same was the case with his replies on corruption and the Maoist insurgency. Experts feel that the unsolved Maoist problem has led to cutbacks in aid and grants.

When a Vietnamese journalist quizzed Koirala on his kitchen cabinet and the influence that his family members has on the government, the PM called it a "stupid question", and refused to answer.

Missing Foreign Minister

Deshantar, 10 September

The Prime Minister is in New York to take part in the UN Summit. This is the ideal time for Nepal to renew and cement its friendship with all the major countries. Thus it is only natural that the foreign minister should accompany the PM in his interaction with world leaders. But our FM is instead in Sweden. Most heads of the state in New York have their foreign relations chiefs with them. With the absence of our Foreign Minister, our Prime Minister cut a sorry figure when it came to the nitty-gritty of foreign affairs.

Last week, when the Japanese PM was in Kathmandu, our foreign minister was in China. Our foreign minister should visit China no doubt, but not when the head of our largest donor is in our country. This surely must have baffled the Japanese.

This underlines the fact that our Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not serious about its work.

Cho Rolpa still dangerous

Himal, 1-16 September

After reducing the water level of the Cho Rolpa lake by three metres, a sense of relief is being felt by the people living along the banks of the river Tamakoshi in the districts of Dolakha and Ramechhap.

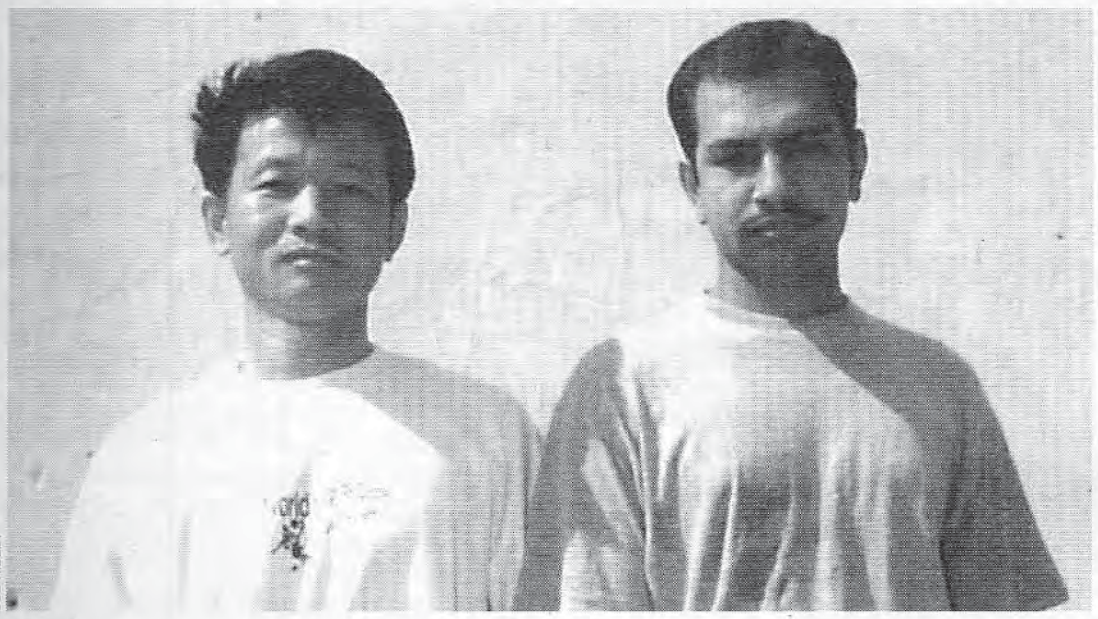
The newly constructed canal removes water from the river at the rate of 6000 litres per second, and this rate is slowly being increased. But for the lake to be safe, the water has to be reduced by at least 17 metres. A British geologist has been studying the area, but he is yet to present his report.

According to specialists, to reduce the level of the lake, a total of 400 pipes is required, but since it was technically not feasible to lay so many pipes, the idea was not followed through. A total of 17 sirens have been placed in appropriate areas, to warn people of the danger should the lake burst.

A total of Rs 199.5 million has been spent on preventing a disaster, but some of the villagers feel that it has all been wasted. They feel that this lake will not burst at all, and that people are only after the money the foreigners will spend on this project.

Situated in Dolakha district, Cho Rolpa lies at a height of 4580 metres above sea level, and is believed to have been formed 50 years ago.

Chandra and Jivan



SUE RIDLEY

"These two young men are no threat to society whatsoever and should not be held in such inhumane conditions. They need the help of their country, their neglect has gone on for too long now."

Chandra and Jivan pose for a prison-approved photograph at the Bangkwang Central Prison (right) earlier this year.

A NEPALI TIMES INVESTIGATION

Like thousands of Nepalis, Chandra Kumar Rai, now 32, was jobless and yearned for a better life. He sold his ancestral property, and paid Rs 75,000 to a foreign employment agency in Kathmandu to take him to South Korea via Thailand.

That was seven years ago. The agent dumped him in Bangkok, Chandra says he was framed by people he was staying with and fell into a drug dragnet by the Thai police. He ended up with a life sentence at the infamous Bangkwang Central Prison. The police who arrested him say they found drugs in the room he was living in, and used this as "evidence" to prove that Chandra was going to deliver it abroad. The Thai pro bono lawyer, Munmine Dutanajaru, is representing Chandra. The judge who sentenced Chandra did so just because he had slept in a room that contained drugs. One Thai justice department official admitted that foreigners often get treated unfairly because of language problems and ignorance about their rights.

Since then, activists who have visited say Chandra and other Asian inmates who cannot afford to pay the guards at the jail have been beaten, mistreated and their appeals for repatriation to Nepal have gone unheeded. The Nepal government itself seems bent on making an example of people like Chandra to dissuade others.

Jivan Thapa was 22 when he was incarcerated at Bangkwang seven years ago. As the eldest son in a large family, Jivan's family had paid what was for it a huge sum of money to send him to Japan. Like Chandra, Jivan got picked up by Thai police in Bangkok and a drug offence was slapped on him. Both Jivan and Chandra say they were forced to sign a confession statement about drug trafficking and say they have not been allowed communication with families in Udaypur and Dharan.

Jivan is deaf in one ear, and says it is result of beatings at the beginning of his jail sentence. He too had travelled to Thailand en route to Japan, but was dumped by his agents. Last week, a Nepali Embassy official went to see Chandra in the presence of a Thai journalist. In what seems to be a move to teach him a lesson, activists say Chandra was transferred from Building #2 to #6, which has much harsher conditions. Jail authorities have taken a dim view of journalists snooping around on behalf of foreign inmates trying to lobby for their release.

In an appeal to the President of the Supreme Court in Thailand, Chandra asked that his case be re-opened, claiming that his arrest was prompted by "greed, corruption and inept attitude" of the police. Activists say the two were apprehended during a period of high graft and mandatory drug-bust quotas. A recent investigative documentary team from the BBC uncovered widespread extortion, beatings, corruption and overcrowding in Bangkwang after the Thai authorities responded to the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and cracked down on trafficking.

Volunteers from the charity, Prisoners Abroad, visited Bankwang and met Jivan and Chandra recently. They were amazed at their determination to survive, to return home to Nepal, and to make something of their lives. Both have learnt to write and speak English fluently and have found ingenious ways to communicate with the outside world.

Writes one recent visitor: "For starters, I can hardly envision less likely partners in crime than Jivan and Chandra. they are not given the food and facilities provided to American or European prisoners, and they don't get help from their embassies."

Western and Japanese prisoners get $84 a month from their embassies to make the lives of their nationals at Bankwang bearable. The Royal Nepal Embassy does not have the budget for this, besides there are 40 other prisoners besides Jivan and Chandra in Bangkok jails, while 25 other cases involving Nepalis are pending. Among them, a few have already served 18 years in Bangkok jails.

"We do not have the concrete evidence but there are reports that some of the Nepali convicts in Thai jails are innocent of the crimes they have been convicted of," Nepal's ambassador to Thailand, Janak Bahadur Singh, told us in a telephone interview.

The case of Chandra and Jivan came to light after British activists who had been campaigning for the release of a British girl also serving in Bankwang was let out two years ago. The activists found that non-Western inmates lived in much worse conditions, and had been more or less abandoned by their home countries.

They have taken up the cause of Chandra and Jivan, and have written to the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office in Kathmandu, the Nepali embassy in Bangkok and to Nepali human rights organisations like INSEC. Says campaigner Sue Ridley: "These two lads are caring and kind, they remain sane despite beatings and the mistreatment. They have had no communication from families in Nepal for seven years, they have very little food and no visitors. I think it is time someone made it possible for them to return home."

After he was duped by the employment agency, but before he was arrested in 1993, Chandra says he had approached the Embassy in Bangkok to help him return to Nepal. But there was no help, and no hope.

For some years now, Thai authorities have been trying to work out an arrangement with the Foreign Ministry in Kathmandu to send back Nepali detainees in Thai jails. A draft proposal laying out the framework of a possible repatriation agreement was sent to Kathmandu. Gyan Chandra Acharya at the Foreign Ministry says Nepal is considering the repatriation proposal allowing the Nepali inmates to complete their sentence in Nepal. "We are talking to other concerned Ministries on how we should respond to the Thai proposal," Acharya told us.

But the ministries don't seem to see the urgency of the problem and appear reluctant to formulate any new laws to allow repatriation. In 1997, the Nepal Police drafted a Mutual Assistance Act, which might have made possible international treaties to transfer Nepali convicts to home jails. The proposed Act is pending in the Law and Justice Ministry. Attorney General Badri Bahadur Karki told us this law is crucial: "Without the act coming into force, the transfer of Nepali convicts to home jails will be difficult."

Chandra and Jivan may be innocent, but according to sources at the Narcotic Drug Control Law Enforcement Unit in Kathmandu, 284 Nepali nationals, including 13 women, were arrested in various countries on charges of narcotic trafficking in the first four months of this year. This is already half the number arrested in the whole of 1999. The highest number of such arrests are in Thailand. The Unit identifies Thailand as the prime destination for narcotic traffickers who use Nepal as a transshipment point for Afghan heroin.

SUE RIDLEY

A police officer with the Narcotic Drug Control Law Enforcement Unit dismisses the chances of Nepalis in Thailand being wrongly convicted. "They might have been forced by poverty to take the risks, but it is not likely that they were framed," he told us.

Meanwhile, back in Bangkwang Chandra and Jivan are beginning their eighth year in jail. If nothing is done, they will be there till they die. American prisoners who share cells with the Nepalis have had their life sentences reduced from life to 40, and then 20 years. Due to a Thai-US treaty, they can serve four years for lesser crimes and eight years for major crimes and then be transferred back to the United States before being paroled.

There is no such hope for the Nepalis in Bangkwang. A Bangkok-based journalist recently visited Chandra and Jivan and spoke with them for two hours. His conclusion: "These two young men are innocent, they are no threat to society whatsoever and should not be held in such inhumane conditions. They need the help of their country, their neglect has gone on for too long now." ♦

Higher HIV risk

The AIDS epidemic in Nepal is riding on trucks and buses. Here, a public health message on a billboard at the Gonga Bu bus park in Kathmandu.

The AIDS epidemic in Nepal is spreading into the general population because of unprotected sex and drug use. And it is no longer confined to "high risk" groups like sex workers, truck drivers and drug user. Latest results from a survey conducted by the STD/AIDS Counselling and Training Services (SACTS) on behalf of Family Health International (FHI) show just how explosive the growth of the epidemic is. Of the 300 sex workers interviewed earlier this year, 17.3 percent were HIV positive. The sero-prevalence among injecting drug users (IDUs) was much higher, at 75 percent, says V.L. Gurbacharya of SACTS.

Between 30-60,000 Nepalis are infected, and in could reach up to 200,000 in the next 10 years. Nepal used to be a "low prevalence" country till recently, today it faces the prospect of a "concentrated epidemic".

Another FHI study reported some positive signs: condom use is up, especially among the "high risk" groups.

The Behavioural Surveillance Survey covered 400 truckers, 600 male labourers and 400 female sex workers in urban centres and settlements in 16 districts along the East-West Highway and compared results with the previous year.

Truck drivers were found to be the main clients of sex workers, followed by migrant workers, police and army personnel and rikshawallas. Over 80 percent used condoms at least once, and it was 68 percent among truckers and 58 percent among male labourers. "Consistent condom use" was also up in all three groups: sex workers, 40 percent, truckers, 51 percent, and male labourers, 32 percent. The findings from the previous year showed 33 percent for the first two groups and 23 percent for male labourers.

Despite this, the figures are fall far short of those needed for effective protection. That would be possible only with 80-90 percent condom coverage levels, says Steve Mills, Associate Director at FHI. That is the level Thailand attained five years ago when the anti-AIDS efforts started yielding results. And that was possible only because the Thai sex industry is "organised" in brothels.

Nepal's sex industry on the other hand is not brothel-based and relies on "street walking". This makes it more difficult to spread the word on condom use. Added complications emerge from trafficking and commercial sex work in India, and the large numbers of seasonal labourers who cross the southern border both ways. ♦

BIZ NEWS

NRB reports 6 percent growth

Nepal Rastra Bank has confirmed the government statement that the economy grew by 6 percent last fiscal year. Agriculture was the mainstay of the growth while the contribution of the beverage, construction and export industries was also significant. Nepal Rastra Bank's 12-month (up to mid-July 2000) economic update also reports low inflation (3.3 percent) and a budget deficit of Rs 10.2 billion—a 13.5 percent increase compared to 1998/99. The government spent Rs 55.76 billion in 1999/00, a 1.1 percentage point increase over the previous year's rate of growth in government spending of 8.8 percent.

The National Urban Consumer Price Index (NUCPI) recorded a rise of 3.3. percent this July, compared to 11.3 percent in July last year. NRB says inflation was controlled mainly because of a drop in food prices. The NUCPI rose by 3.7 percent in the hills, 3.6 in Kathmandu, and 3 percent in the Tarai.

Exports continued to do well, growing by 44.7 percent to reach Rs 51.6 billion. But imports also went up, by 22.2 percent to Rs 106.9 billion. Among exports, garments recorded the highest increase, while woollen carpets remained more or less at last year's level. Pashmina, however, has registered moderate growth. The balance of payments (BOP) recorded a surplus of Rs 13.4 billion in the first 10 months of fiscal year 1999/00. However, due to increasing imports, the current account deficit touched Rs 4.2 billion. The BOP surplus was a result mainly of receipts of miscellaneous capital items, which is a sort of a "catch all" item in the BOP account.

BOP surplus in mid-July stood at Rs 14 billion, the Bank said, as a result of which foreign exchange holdings in the banking system increased by 22.6 percent to Rs 94 billion.

LG's new range

The South Korean electronics giant, LG, is introducing a new range of electronic and household appliances and adding six new service outlets in Nepal.

Among them are new refrigerators that come with "door cooling", in addition to the normal back cooling that most of such appliances have. It is also introducing larger capacity washing machines, including ones that allow front-loading. LG, which claims to be the leader in refrigerator sales with a 25 percent share in the Nepali market, now sells over 20 models.

The new television range being offered include LG's Flatrons that come in different colour casings to allow customers to choose models to match their interior decors. LG—originally Goldstar—which has been associated with Nepal's Chaudhary Group for the last 13 years, will continue selling "economy" TV brands in the 14" and 20" range, company officials said. The company is also entering the mobile phone market.

LG's new service outlets are to be opened in Butwal, Nepalgunj, Birtamod, Janakpur, Dhangadi and Mahendranagar, which will complement those already existing in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Biratnagar and Narayanghat.

Regal Room at Yak & Yeti

The Yak & Yeti Hotel has unveiled what it claims is the capital's largest convention hall to add to its existing facilities comprising of four smaller meeting rooms and two board rooms.

The newly opened Regal Room measures 144 by 58 feet and can accommodate over 1000 people at a time, says the hotel. The new set up can also be divided into two rooms with sound-proof partitions for use by smaller groups.

Rawal challenges sacking

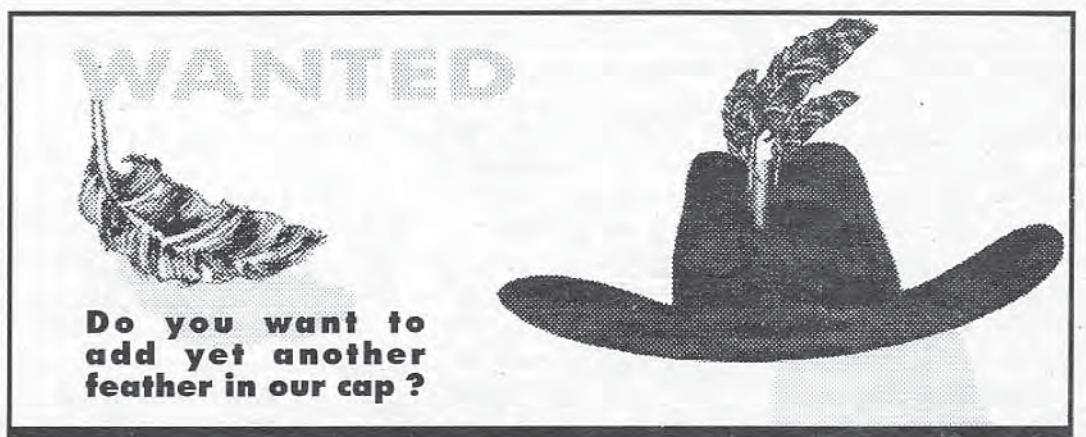
Former Nepal Rastra Bank governor, Tilak Rawal, has challenged his sacking in a petition filed at the Supreme Court last week. Rawal says he was appointed for a five-year term and his dismissal within seven months was unfair.

PPA reviews

A government official said last week that a "review" of the power purchase agreements (PPAs) between independent power producers (IPPs) and the Nepal Electricity Authority was underway, following directives issued by a parliamentary committee.The review comes a few months after the first IPP, Khimti Hydroelectric project (60MW), began supplying power to the NEA. Another IPP, the 36-MW Bhote Kosi, is nearing completion.

The IPPs have not commented on the government's recent move to invoke the clause that allows "review of the PPAs in good faith". Privately, however, they say any such attempt will not bode well for new investments in the hydro sector.

According to the PPAs with both Khimti and the Bhote Kosi projects, NEA will have to buy all the power generated at approximately seven US cents, the highest in the region.



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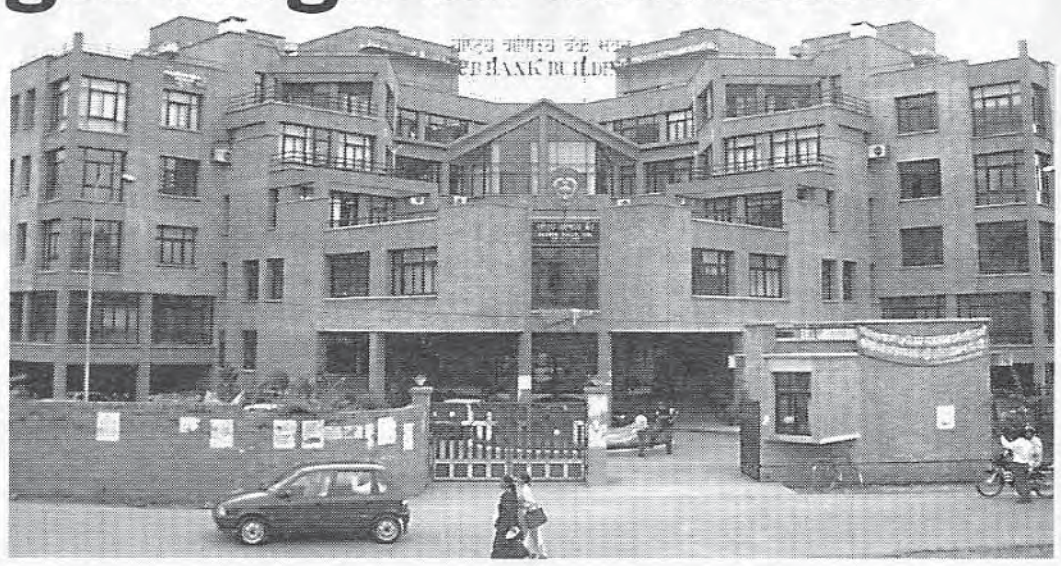
Rastriya Banijya Bank to get tough on defaulters



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The Rastriya Banijya Bank (RBB) says it has begun taking steps to salvage what remains of the country's largest bank.

We have problems but we're doing our best to find ways to resolve them, was the gist of what Punya Prasad Dahal, executive chairman of RBB, told the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) last week.

Dahal, however, admitted that the bank would not be able to recover all of its bad debts, and said that a high-level committee should be formed to decide how to get the money back. Some of the bank's bad loans date back to the mid-1960s, and the borrowers either do not want to or cannot pay them back.

The PAC has formed a five-member sub-committee to study the various audit reports—including the one by the international auditing group, KPMG, that had declared RBB "technically insolvent"—and recommend measures to keep the government bank afloat.

RBB has begun a credit audit of some of its larger loans to provide a basis for recovery. As things stand today, we may have to take over ownership of all the large hotels of Kathmandu Valley to get back our money, Dahal said, indicating who some of the bigger defaulters were.

According to the RBB, based only on principal and not accumulated interest, about 23 percent of its total investment of Rs 29.91 billion is either of "poor quality" or outright "bad." The bad and doubtful loans, defined as those whose repayments have been overdue by one year and above add up to Rs. 4.6 billion and an additional Rs 1.6 billion is overdue by six to 12 months.

One loan to a certain Bir Bahadur Rai which began with Rs 80 million now has overdue interest payments that add up to over Rs 750 million, bank officials said. Such loans are the most difficult to realise.

"I will do the best I can to reduce irregularities by transferring managers," Dahal said, responding to MPs who said that corrupt bank officials were the major reason for RBB's bad loans. He added that loan recovery was a priority and a committee had already been formed to tackle this problem.

Another major problem with loan recovery, he said, was litigation, leading to indefinite delays in collection. About 165 such cases are pending in the courts, say bank officials.

Nepal does not have specific laws to address to loan recovery and existing laws are either inadequate or just unclear on how banks can go about getting back their money. Many borrowers continue to take advantage of the situation to delay their payments. The government had announced it would formulate laws to recover loans and cover bankruptcy declarations but both have been delayed because of the unceremonious end of the parliament's budget session, forced after inner-party wrangling in the ruling Nepali Congress began to spill over into the House debates. ♦

Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.10	5.20
84 Days t/bill	5.00	5.10
91 Days t/bill	5.21	5.30
365 Days t/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.80	5.80

Average rate of 91 day T/bill moved lower due to aggressive bidding by some of the banks having huge maturity. Market liquidity seems to be excessive due to maturity of T/Bill acquired by banks through NRB Secondary Market. The rate is expected to remain under pressure next week. Expected range for next week 5.10-5.35 percent.

FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.38	5.00
LIBOR (1M)	6.63	4.66	6.06	0.40	3.19

BANK RATES(DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/3.5	5.32
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0	6.81
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5	13.54
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0	13.49
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5	11.52
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0	10.96
MISC LOAN	17.5/13.5	15.13

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL(Barrel)	33.38	31.95	+ 4.48
GOLD(Ounce)	276.75	274.25	+ 0.91
GOLD (NPR *)	7150	7075	+ 1.06
EUR	0.9004	0.9030	- 0.29
GBP	1.4619	1.4720	- 0.69
JPY	105.85	106.25	- 0.38
CHF	1.7240	1.7093	+ 0.86
AUD	0.5763	0.5732	+ 0.54
INR	45.71	45.77	- 0.13

*Currency bid prices at 3.45 p.m. on 4/9 - Source Reuters

Oil : Oil prices rose higher with the market convinced that any OPEC supply increase agreed at its policy meeting would fail to check runaway prices.

Currencies : The dollar tumbled to eight -week lows against the Yen after weaker than expected US jobs and manufacturing data reinforced the view that the US economy is slowing. The US dollar was boosted by several positive influences. Lingering concern that higher Euro zone interest rates could harm growth continue to haunt the currency.

INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK :
The Indian rupee ended firm after trading in a stable range. The outlook for the currency was firm on hopes of large dollar inflows from telecom firms and foreign funds. Dollar supplies were expected from remittances by Singapore Telecommunication, which last month bought stake in two firms owned by India's Bharti group for $400 million.

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

	6 months	1 year
SAARC countries	US$25	US$48
Other countries	US$40	US$75

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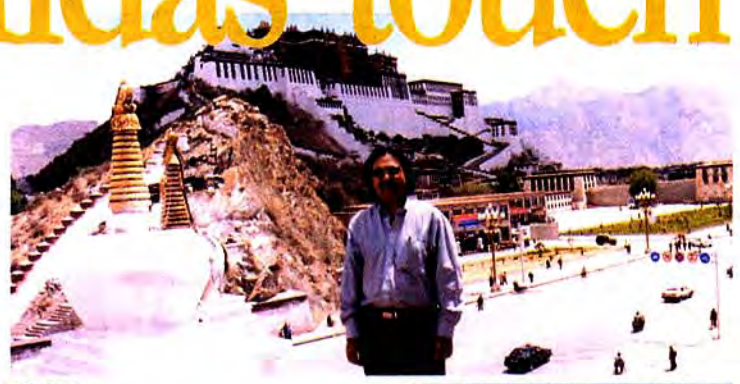
Shyam's Midas touch

Nearly everything Shyam Kakshapati touches turns into gold. Now the Nepali entrepreneur is invading Tibet!



Kurintar Riverside Spring Resort and Bakery Cafe (below left)

BINOD BHATTARAI

Shyam Kakshapati is one of very few Nepali businessmen who has built a business empire without taking the usual shortcut to success. He has succeeded not by cutting corners or by buying monopoly licences using connections in high places. Rather Shyam chose the hard way: going directly to his customers with products they need, maintaining consistent quality and providing it at affordable prices. Now Nepal's best-known restaurateur is taking his culinary and management skills to Lhasa.

Shyam's Nanglo Group has just taken over two restaurants in Lhasa under a management contract and will begin operations in November. The Tibet Nanglo Newei is now being refurbished and redesigned. "We're also working on a new menu," says Shyam, who has just returned from Lhasa. Tibet Nanglo Newei will offer Continental, Nepali and Indian cuisine to the 45,000 tourists that visit Lhasa every year and to the locals who seem to favour the Nepali taste. With so many potential customers, Shyam believes he can make the idea sell.

Shyam's Nanglo Restaurant has been a fixture at Durbar Marg for over two decades, a cosy watering hole for locals and tourists. His chain of fast-food restaurants, the well-known Bakery Cafes, are all doing well. After investing over Rs 100 million in his restaurant chain and having reached the limits of growth within the Kathmandu Valley, Shyam decided to strike out for Tibet.

Shyam has always ventured where Nepalis have feared to tread, going forth boldly into new areas of business, taking risks and reaping rewards. At 48, Shyam looks much younger—especially with George Harrison-length hair rubbing his shoulders. What makes Shyam's myriad ideas click?

"You have to give people their money's worth," he says. "Evaluate yourself what is the best price for what you are selling. The rest depends on the merit of the business idea, timing, determination and hard work."

Shyam came to Kathmandu as a mere boy from Tansen in Palpa district. Born into a family of traders, his knack for feeling the public's pulse is partly inherited. But his ideas were need-driven and moulded by his own experiences while growing up.

Before going into business, Shyam even flirted with the idea of becoming an airline pilot. But after losing his father at 14, he was pushed into the family's trading business. Shyam the iconoclast could not long remain satisfied with the traditional businesses and soon moved into new and uncharted territory.

It all began with Cafe de Park, a restaurant he opened at Ratna Park in 1973. Cafe de Park was an instant hit. What Kathmandu did not have at the time was a place where people could listen to good music, meet others and generally hang out. Cafe de Park provided the city's post hippie-era youth a place they could call their own. "We had the best music in town," he says. "The idea clicked and I was encouraged to do more."

Nanglo came about three years later. By this time Ratna Park had gone down-market after a bus stop was moved there. Shyam was also moving into a new client segment: business executives. Nanglo Bar had just 18 stools when it started. But the idea caught on, and it expanded quickly. Two years later, he started the Nanglo Chinese Room next door converting an existing Japanese restaurant. That's when things really started picking up. Recalls Shyam: "From there I have kept on moving."

Next stop was Kathmandu's first supermarket: Nanglo Bazaar at Putali Sadak, one of the few ventures along with his taxi idea that had to close down. Shyam says he learnt a lesson from this: don't start a supermarket on rented property because it takes long time to make your shop a landmark.

Shyam's vision for his taxi fleet was to have large, comfortable cabs with two-way radios that clients could call to their homes. His taxis, the city's first Yellow Cabs, initially did well, and was good while it lasted, but was soon forced out of the street by smaller rivals.

"Well, as a business it did fine," Shyam says about his taxis. The real reason it had to close was government policy which changed to allow small cars to be operated as taxis—as against the earlier one that required bigger cars.

Shyam Kakshapati next did to momo-chas what McDonald's did to hamburgers. He turned dumplings traditionally sold by small family kitchens in the city's narrow bylanes into fast food by dispensing them through clean and efficient outlets on major thoroughfares. Bakery Cafe was a sort of revival of Cafe de Park. There are now six outlets in Kathmandu Valley, and one each at Kurintar and Tansen. Another one is opening in Narayanghat. Butwal is next.

At the Baneshwor Bakery Cafe, Shyam began with 12 people with hearing defect as waiters. He personally oversaw their training to take orders in slips of paper with the help of an assistant who could communicate in sign language. Says Shyam: "Everyone can run a restaurant. I wanted a challenge and also provide employment to people that society ignored as invalids. This is very special to me, I see happy faces every day."

Three Bakery outlets employ 30 staff with speech and hearing disabilities, and two of them have become supervisors. With managers trained in sign language, they train other waiters with hearing and speech impairment.

Even as the Bakery Cafe chain grew, Shyam and his wife, Rani, were involved in education as well. Suvatara School in Sanepa today has 550 students, and the first batch is now preparing for their A level exams. Says Shyam: "The school is our dream, not a business. It is a lot of work but the school has given me more happiness than all my businesses." Shyam has seen students enrol as small children, and watched them grow into young adults, wiser and full of promise.

Another Shyam venture that took off immediately after it started is the Riverside Spring Resort at Kurintar, 100 km from Kathmandu on the Prithvi Highway. There was a shortage of decent places to stop on the highway for tourists and moneyed Nepalis alike, and Kurintar was the right thing at the right time.

Today, Kurintar is a destination in its own right for Kathmandu residents who want to spend a day out, and tie it all in with a pilgrimage on the Manakamana cable car. What he has now created in Kurintar is a destination where families travel for weekend outings, especially in winter.

Shyam's latest venture is a delicatessen at Thamel, with a well-stocked salad bar that allows customers to make their own sandwiches. A bakery is also attached to the restaurant to allow clients watch their sandwich being made right from the dough stage.

If imitation is the best form of flattery, Shyam must feel flattered by all the other clones that have opened since Nanglo and Bakery Cafe. We wonder what is going on inside Shyam's head now, what new ideas for business?

"Even my wife comes to know of my projects only when it's almost ready to go," he says. But he does give a hint of how his thought process works: "You need to find out what people need, imagine an idea that will fulfil that need and go for it."

SHYAM'S EMPIRE

Nanglo International (P) Ltd
Nanglo (P) Ltd
Nanglo Bakeries (P) Ltd
Tansen Restaurant and Bar
Nanglo West Inc
The Bakery Café
Riverside Spring Resort
Nanglo Deli
Tibet Nanglo Newei
(upcoming)

Looking for the *Yeti*

The *Yeti* was a Pilatus Porter that crashed at 5,200 m below Dhaulagiri in 1960. This month, an expedition is going to look for it, take it back to Switzerland, and make it fly again.

GENEVA – Next week, a ten-member expedition will set out from Kathmandu to recover a legend, one which makes the hearts of all mountain climbers and recreational pilots beat faster.

The wreckage of the famous ***Yeti*** plane has been lying around for more than 40 years now up in Nepal's snowy heights of 5,700 metres. The tiny airplane was the prototype for the Swiss aircraft Pilatus Porter PC-6 and in 1960 it had a major role in helping a team of climbers from Switzerland to succeed in scaling the Dhaulagiri, till then the only 8,000-plus metres mountain in the Himalayas which had not yet been conquered.

Altogether, the ***Yeti*** made 16 flights to carry equipment and supplies of the expedition led by Max Eiselin. The plane's fans claim that its landings at an altitude of 5,700 metres are to this day a world record. But on the 17th flight on May 5, 1960, the plane crashed on takeoff. The two pilots survived, but they had to leave the Porter PC 6 behind.

"The Porter PC-6 is a great airplane and for this reason till this day is constructed almost without any changes by the Pilatus works," says Bruno Assuelli, president of the Porter Vintage Association. "The only difference now is that the plane has a turbine engine, instead of a piston motor."

Assuelli's club has now set itself an ambitious goal. The remains of the ***Yeti***, which has lost some of its parts to souvenir hunters and locals over the decades, are now to be recovered in a 16-day expedition. The plane is to be brought back to Switzerland via Kathmandu.

The expedition is due to leave from Munich on 28 September. If ***Yeti*** fans have their way, then the multi-purpose plane which now enjoys a cult following will then be fully restored and made fit for flying excursions again.

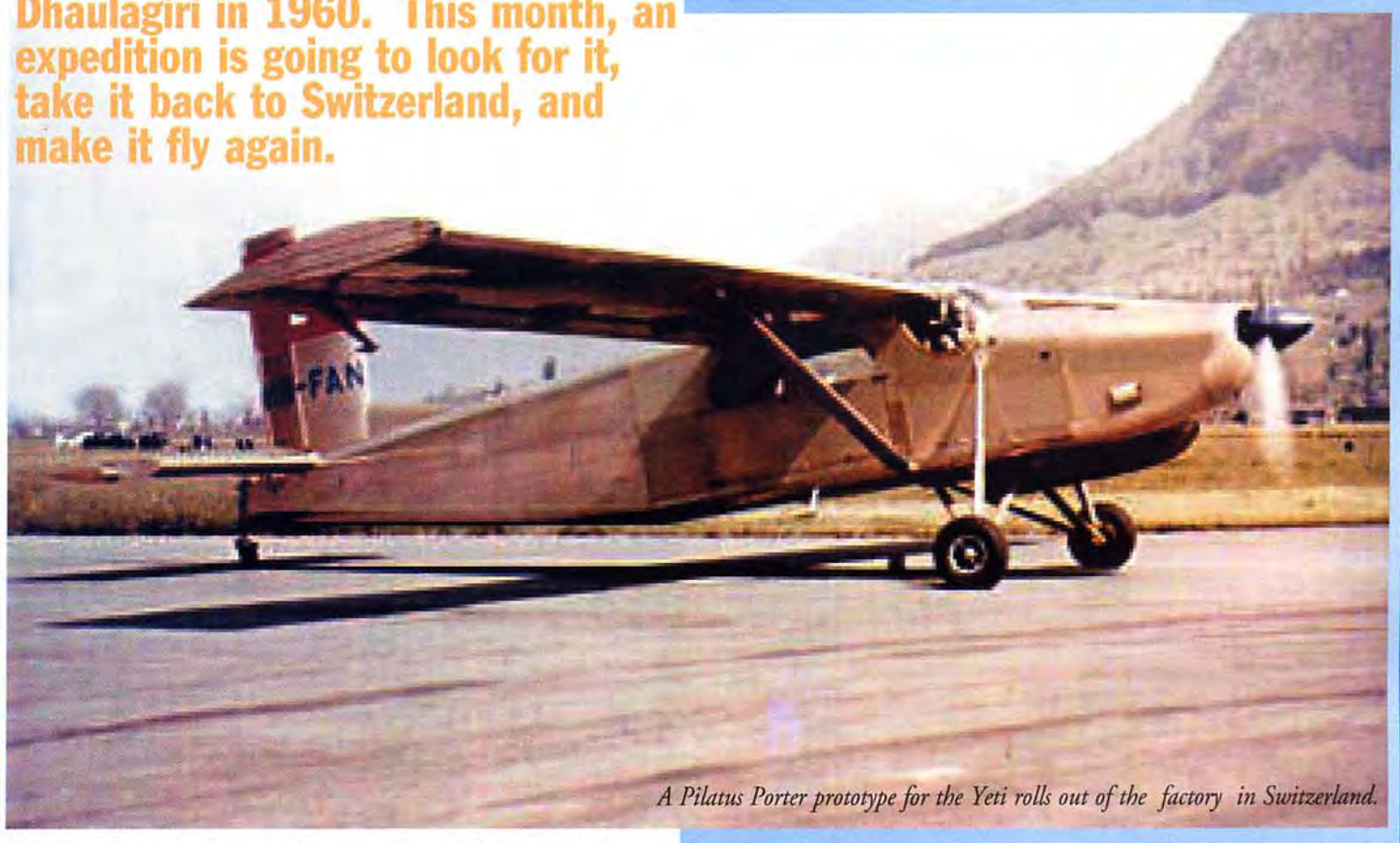
Since the entire project is a costly one - total expenses of $240,000 dollars, the expedition hopes for support from the Pilatus company and the German Alpine Association.

"We are going by the principle that the rubbish left behind by earlier expeditions should vanish from the Himalaya mountains," expedition leader Leo Caminada, said.

Caminada is mountain climber, engineer and pilot and knows his way in the region. For years he served as advisor to the King of Bhutan in the construction of mountain railways. His main hope now is that his nine fellow expedition members will not get worn out on Dhaulagiri.

"Given the thin air at more than 5,000 metres altitude, cutting apart an airplane is not as easy as many people might imagine," he says. His expedition members are between 28 and 57 years old and all are mountain climbers. ♦

For further information: www.porter-yeti.org



A Pilatus Porter prototype for the Yeti rolls out of the factory in Switzerland.

(Clockwise from top left.) The Yeti *prepares to take off after dropping cargo below Dhaulagiri, photograph taken on 25 May, 1960 after the mishap, in the past 30 years the fuselage has been twisted by high winds on Dhampus Pass.*

Emil Wick

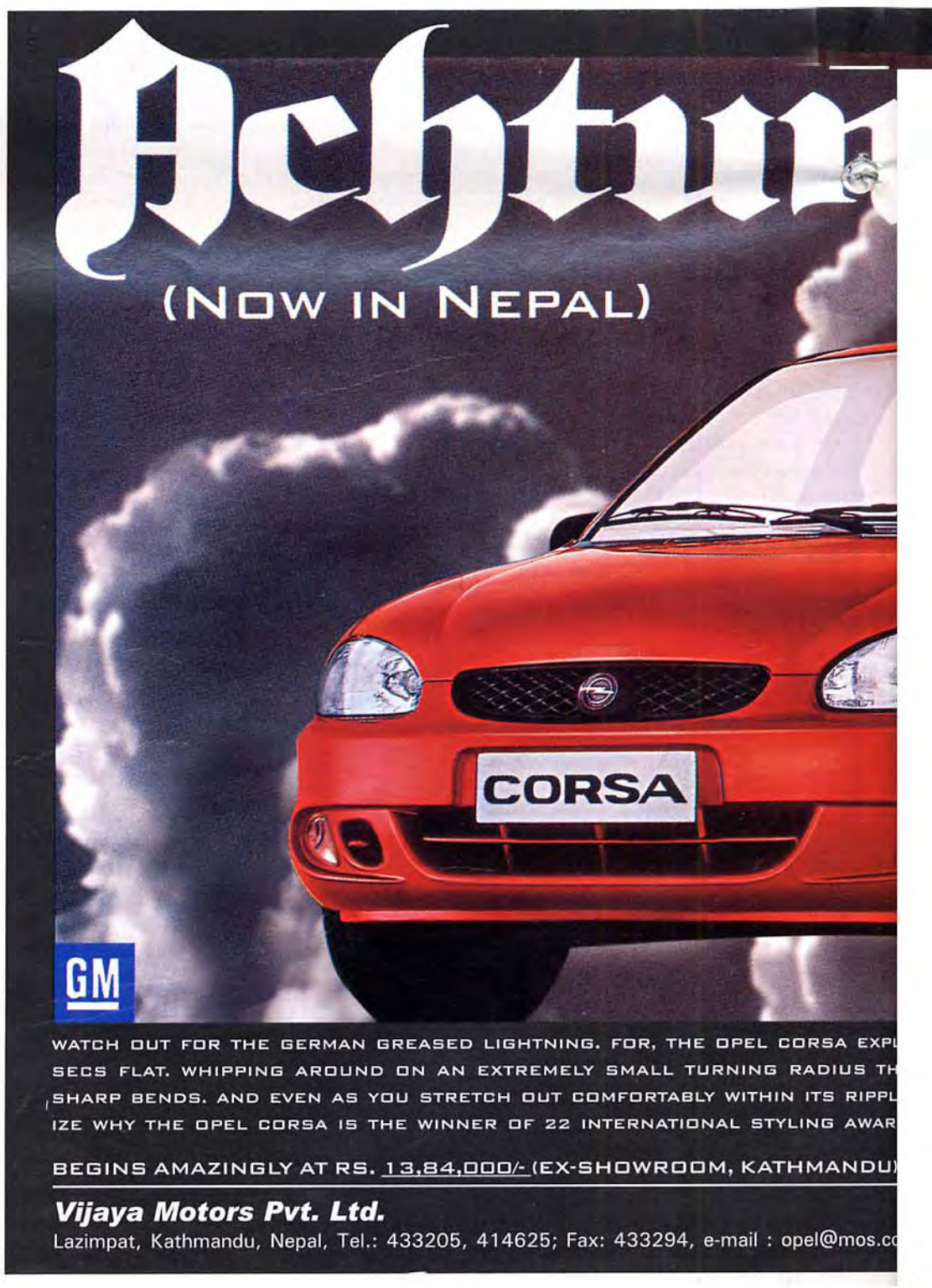
STAN ARMINGTON

For nearly five decades, the rugged Pilatus Porter was the workhorse of Himalayan aviation in Nepal. If its contemporary, the DC-3 was a Land Rover that serviced grass strips in the midhills and tarai, then the Pilatus Porter was as versatile as a yak. It could land just about anywhere, it climbed like a rocket, glided like a parachute, and even though it wasn't pressurised its turboprop version could fly to 9,000 m.

It is also a testimony to the dangers of flying in the Himalaya that virtually all the Pilatus Porters that served in Nepal are no more. The first one to come to grief was the *Yeti* which crashed on Dhampus Pass in 1960 (*see accompanying article*) and the last one hit a mountain in bad weather near Namche Bazar two years ago killing its pilot. A private airline is thinking of getting a Pilatus, and unless it does, the days of these fine flying machines will sadly pass.

Perhaps no one knew the Pilatus and flying in the Himalaya better than that great legend, Captain Emil Wick. Emil was sent by the Pilatus factory in 1972 to train pilots of Royal Nepal Airlines which had acquired three of the planes. But Nepali pilots didn't particularly like flying the single-engined Pilatus. Emil, however, *loved* to fly the Porter and by the time he retired had logged more than 14,000 hours.

Emil came first to Nepal in 1960 to pilot the *Yeti*, a red-and-yellow plane with Swiss registration brought to Nepal by the Polish-Austrian-Swiss expedition to Dhaulagiri. At that time Nepal's hinterland was very much off limits to foreigners, passengers on domestic flights had to have their passports stamped, and planes had to carry liaison officers. The *Yeti* played an important part in the successful Swiss ascent of Dhaulagiri. The approach route was over some



k's adventures with the Pilatus Porter

Perhaps no one knew the Pilatus Porter and flying in the Himalaya better than that great legend, Captain Emil Wick.

high passes that were dangerous for porters on foot, so the expedition team stamped out a landing strip in the snow near the northeast col a bit above 5,200m. It's still in the Guinness book of records as the highest landing of a fixed wing aircraft. Emil made many ski landings here, ferrying expedition supplies and bringing back ice in drums so they could cool their beers in Pokhara.

I asked Emil about the *Yeti*. "Sure, we crashed at Dhampus. I remember the day, 25 May, 1960. I was not flying, it was a Swiss military pilot. We were not so high, 5200 meters, but that was high enough for a crash. Finally we went on the nose, then went downhill onto the propeller. It was nicely bent, then we went nose down and hit a rock that turned us 180 degrees. The plane is still there. We couldn't go down because the weather was bad, but we had food for two days. Finally we walked down to Tukuche, stopped for the night and then we hired some porters and went to Pokhara. I'm the only person to walk down Dhaulagiri without climbing up."

In 1973 Emil again ferried expedition gear to Dhaulagiri, this time to an American expedition. Instead of landing on the glacier, he airdropped the supplies. "I had to squeeze my ass out over the Annapurna range and cross the Kali Gandaki valley. The crosswinds were deadly up there at 25,000 feet. We had to do the droppings from the west to the east if possible. We went up and if Dhampus was clear we crossed it and then went to French Col at 17,500 ft. We would turn and come from the west, fly past the spot at 19,200 ft where we landed in 1960, come low and slow and drop. Sometimes the boxes caught an updraft and went higher up before they dropped."

"One day we went and bought a chicken in Pokhara, a nice cock. I put the chicken on the copilots seat and tied a long streamer on it so we could watch it fall.

"We dropped the cargo on the snow. They told us by radio thank you, thank you very much, wonderful. We went round again and rrrrp, out went that bloody cock. He went down circling and landed very close to the kitchen tent. It was alive, and that cook said fine, we eat the bastard, we have two bottles of wine.

But the Sherpas said no, you cannot kill it, it will upset the gods and spoil the expedition. So that cock sat on the glacier until it got frostbitten feet and went snow blind. This was probably the highest-landing chicken in the world at 17,500 feet. Finally when the expedition was done, they took it down to Tukche and cooked it for dinner."

I remember flying to Shyangboche with Emil once. We overflew Lukla, that notorious airstrip on a ten-degree slope uphill with a mountain at the end. Emil told me about the time he had landed at Lukla backwards, banking in front of the mountain and landing downhill. In a few minutes, we pass Namche and Emil takes a few sucks from the oxygen mask, lowers the flaps and heads for the postage-stamp-sized runway. We make the obligatory yak pass to scare the animals off the runway, barely skimming the trees and the huge rock, make a turn in front of Kwangde peak and land in a cloud of dust with plenty of runway to spare.

A year or so later I was sitting at Lukla waiting for a flight. The weather was lousy - rain at Lukla and snow in the high mountains. Emil had slipped into Shyangboche a few days earlier and got trapped in the sudden storm, and had to sit on a snowy runway swearing into the radio. Suddenly, at about 4 pm I heard a plane. I grabbed my rucksack and headed for the airport just in time to see the Pilatus Porter emerge from the clouds above Lukla.

"Anybody for Kathmandu?" said Emil as the weather started to close in. Anyone in Lukla with any sense is either in bed or drunk by 4 pm, so I was the only one to jump into the plane as the airport staff hollered from their beds that it was illegal for me to fly without a ticket. By the clouds had obscured the end of the runway, but Emil said "let's go!" and off we went.

"Shit!" he muttered after we were airborne. There were mountains all around us and Emil was flying blind through cloud. "Aha, there's one!" he said as he spotted a hole and we shot almost straight up, the propeller in front emerging into the late afternoon sun. "Alpha Bravo Charlie departed Lukla at 16:15, present level 160, estimated Kathmandu 17:00," said Emil into the radio.

"Say again" came the crackle from Kathmandu control. Emil replied: "160, that's 16 thousand feet." radioed Emil. "Negative, you cannot fly that high," said the tower. And off went the radio as he turned to me with a grin.

As we come over Lamjura, Emil recounts another tale: landing transversely across the runway at Kathmandu in a dust storm. "We were coming back from Langtang. The weather was bad. We came down that Trisuli valley and it started to snow. I couldn't see nicely. I said to myself, be careful, flaps down, slowly, slowly. I could open the window but I couldn't put my head out. It hits like needles, that snow. I heard on the radio: Airport is closed, all aircraft diverting, wind is 35, gusting up to 40 knots. That was strong wind. And below us the Thai DC-8 was down with its ass in the air after an overshoot."

LUDMILA TUTING

Captain Emil Wick with his beloved "Bravo Charlie" Pilatus Turboporter of Royal Nepal Airlines.

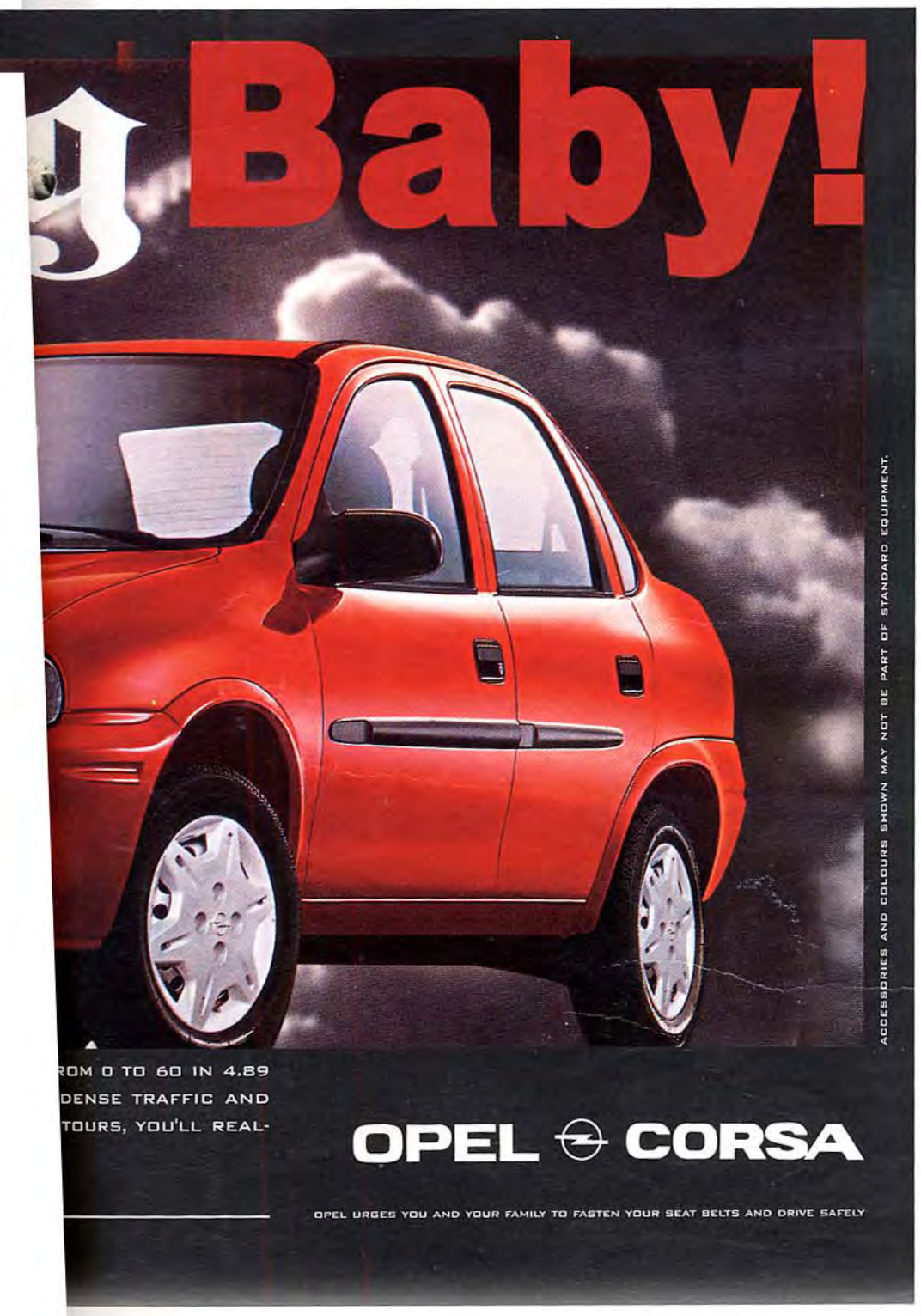
"Jee-sus Christ, I thought, now no bullshit. I told the tower 'I cannot divert, I don't know where, and there's a thunder-storm. I have fuel for 45 minutes left, I'm landing across the airstrip. She said "Negative! Negative! No permission.' Somehow we had to get down.The wind dipped to 25 knots. It's now or never. I told the tower I'm turning for approach. Negative, negative, no permission! We landed into the wind and had stopped by the width of the runway. The Director of the Airport came over and wanted me to file a report why I didn't follow orders. I said you want to kill me or what?"

Emil left Royal Nepal Airlines and Nepal in 1985 and returned to Switzerland to work at the Pilatus factory. In Nepal, everyone has heard of Capt Wick and he still returns periodically. In his last visit in 1995 he dropped in on the Royal Nepal Airlines office and didn't know anyone there. Until word got around the office, he was just some old guy with gray hair. Emil has had heart surgery, and has been in and out of hospital in Geneva for the past six months.

His beloved "Alpha Bravo Charlie" has long been cannibalised, it sits alone in an unmarked field near the airport, forlorn and forgotten. And the wasp-like drone of the Pilatus Porter has died out from the Nepali sky. Only the legend remains. ♦

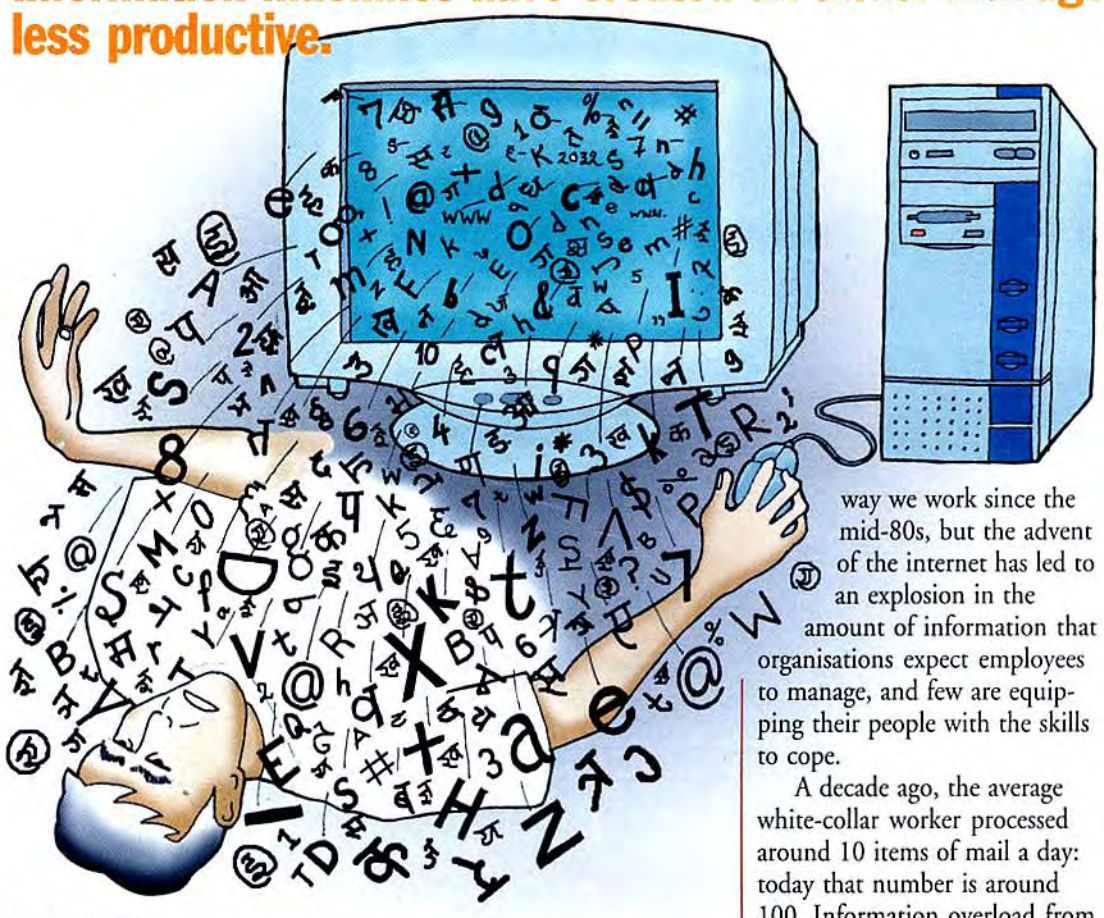
KAMAL TULADHAR

A Royal Nepal Airlines Pilatus prepares to take off from Shyangboche airstrip 3,900 m. Mt Thamserku looms over the runway.



Do you suffer from information overload?

Information machines have created an under-managed, over-energised workforce that is less productive.



JEAN GOMES

We are in the middle of a revolution and most of us are still unaware of its real consequences. The biggest change in our working practices since the industrial revolution is here, all thanks to the personal computer.

PCs have been changing the way we work since the mid-80s, but the advent of the internet has led to an explosion in the amount of information that organisations expect employees to manage, and few are equipping their people with the skills to cope.

A decade ago, the average white-collar worker processed around 10 items of mail a day: today that number is around 100. Information overload from a range of sources - email, intranets and mobile phones - has created a new under-managed, over-energised work environment which is actually reducing, not increasing, productivity and people's feelings of empowerment.

Studies by pollsters Mori and NOP conclude that "techno-rage" leaves 50% of people who use a computer at work feeling "helpless and frustrated". A tenth say IT makes them "feel stupid" and "want to walk out". One in five holds Bill Gates personally responsible.

The emphasis in many organisations is on volume of work. New ideas and quality of thought take a back seat when you break down what people actually do.

Speed is not the same as responsiveness and less is frequently more. I regularly watch the madness of senior executives in brainstorming meetings, of all places, logging onto their laptops to catch up with emails, such is the corporate culture of instant response to even the most banal inquiry. Do we really want computers to set the agenda for how we humans work?

One of the most admired skills today is the ability to process huge amounts of information. In his recent book on global change, Futurewise, Patrick Dixon suggests that "text scanning" is a major third millennial skill: "(The) ability to scan a page of A4 text every five to 15 seconds and underline 90% of relevant data with a marker. Ability to scan an entire 250-page book and underline 50 key sentences in less than 20 minutes. Ability to write a two paragraph, world-class executive summary on a product or company you have never heard of, using a wide variety of online databases, in less than 30 minutes." But do we really want people to be judged on the same merits as computers?

HumanITy, the world's first digital charity, thinks not. It was established five years ago with the aim of making the benefits of the knowledge economy and digital revolution available to everyone. HumanITy wants to investigate the social impact of the IT revolution, to design projects to help overcome the potential counterproductive issues of the information revolution, and to lobby government, IT companies and businesses to see their responsibilities to manage this revolution with care.

People need to be taught how to use email effectively, rather than succumbing to the temptation to be permanently online. Technology companies need to think more about human interaction with software and less about increased speed and functionality that 99% of us don't use or need.

Information technology is the defining achievement of our age. It is shaping our thinking, our work and our future. In a recent essay in Wired magazine, the bible of the network revolution, Bill Joy, co- founder of Sun Microsystems, suggests that human beings face "something like extinction" in two generations if computer intelligence and biotechnology follow their current development curve. He puts it in strong terms: "We are on the cusp of extreme evil."

This sounds dramatic but we live in a world that our grand-parents would find unrecognisable. Unless we think deeply about how technology is shaping our lives, we have little chance of ensuring that our grandchildren will live in the sort of world we would wish for them. ♦ *(The Guardian)*

(Jean Gomes is chairman of HumanITy, the world's first digital charity and managing director of the IT consultancy dPa)

Netiquette

Ten Commandments of e-mail help turn rough notes into polished gems

London - "Manner is personality—the outward manifestation of one's innate character and attitude toward life," wrote Emily Post in 1922. Now, spurred by harsh necessity, Britain, land of bizarre dining rituals and perfect manners, has finally produced a high-tech successor to the reigning manners queen.

About 42 percent of Britons have Internet access at work and they send an average of 39 e-mails daily—which is good. Unfortunately, quite a few of them can barely write a simple but understandable English sentence. The flood of incorrect or just plain old incomprehensible business e-mails they spew out daily has become a real problem for their employers. That's not so good. Major corporations like Unilever, the national British supermarket chain Tesco and Waterstone's, the country's largest book-seller, have already hired English tutors to teach their employees how to write an intelligible e-mail.

Apparently alarmed by that situation, the aristocratically- oriented British newspaper The Daily Mail has taken on the challenge of mastering the problem of substandard national netiquette. The paper has published a list of good manners for e-mails: the ten commandments for Internet cyber-apostles.

1. Always use the right form of address.

2. Pay attention to style. Never write an e-mail in upper-case letters. Using capital letters in an e-mail is the equivalent of yelling at someone.

3. Stop and think before you hit the "send" button. Quickly written and carelessly phrased e-mails can hurt the receiver deeply.

4. Check your e-mail regularly. Letting an e-mail go unanswered is just as impolite as not answering a letter.

5. Avoid cyberbabble. Only someone who can write an intelligent and understandable sentence in normal English should use abbreviations and writing styles common on the Internet.

6. Avoid techno-jargon. Assuming an e-mail's recipient has a broad knowledge of computer technology is impolite. A courteous Internet user will make sure that an e-mail recipient has whatever programme he or she needs to open whatever attachments the sender may be including with his or her message.

7. Avoid mass-mailings. Group e-mails are OK for sharing a good joke, but they shouldn't be used for much more than that.

8. Always try to say something nice in your message. Not only do you catch more flies with sugar than you do with vinegar, getting a nice e-mail can brighten an otherwise bleak day for someone.

9. E-dumping shows no class at all. Breaking up with a lover by e-mail is just plain rude.

10. Remember that e-mails, like cats, have nine lives—or at least, they hang around on system servers, hard drives and in programmes long after telephone calls have dissipated into thin air. Be sure you write them, as Emily Post once said of letters, with "the divinely flexible gift for a fresh turn of phrase, for delightful keenness of observation" that will make them a joy to read again, years from now.

Good advice, that, and not just for Internet users. ♦ *(Die Welt)*

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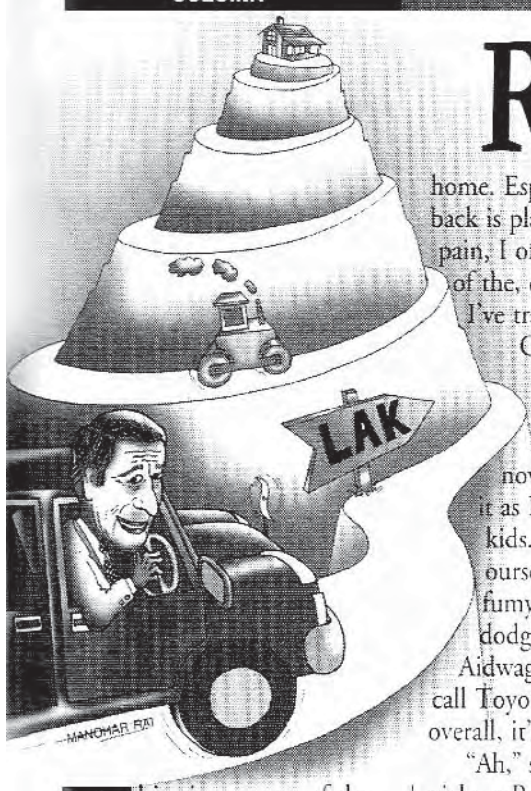
COLUMN

by DANIEL LAK

Roads to nowhere



This is a part of the world where roads matter a great deal. They are lifelines for all who live here. Yet, despite archaeological evidence that South Asians were building roads when Europeans were living in caves, poorly made, dangerous and inappropriate land routes crisscross the region, and worse, they continue to be constructed.

I'm not going to pick on any particular place here, certainly not Nepal. But the state of the road that leads to my house is scandalous. Potholes that devour school buses and clouds of dust left over from the Big Bang always enliven my journey home. Especially when my lower back is playing up. To ease the pain, I often think about some of the, er, interesting roads I've travelled in South Asia.

One of them leads from my back gate to the British School in Kupondole. For weeks now, I've been admiring it as I stroll along with the kids. Occasionally we find ourselves choking from a fumy two-wheeler or dodging a badly driven Aidwagon, as I've learned to call Toyota Land Cruisers. But overall, it's a nice road.

"Ah," said a friend the other night, a Patan-ite borne and bred, "that was paved for Prince Charles when he came to see the British school." Crash went my hopes that perhaps the odd decent road does emerge if only by rare, benign intention. VIP paving jobs, of course, are nothing new in this part of the world.

While stationed in Islamabad, I explored the lovely Margalla Hills behind the city. We used to start at the bottom, near our house, and make our way up various trails to one peak or another—nothing by Nepali standards but a good way to walk off cocktail receptions. Then at the top, our "transport" would arrive. People more important than I, with drivers who didn't get a day off, would whisk us all to the bottom again. That was the real adventure, navigating the apparent bomb craters on the Margalla hills access road.

Miraculously, one day in 1994, I awoke like Rumpelstiltskin to realise that I wasn't gasping with pain, or elevating my posterior, as we drove down. I mentioned this to my host, who queried his driver. A burst of rapid-fire Urdu ensued in which the words "Hillary Clinton" were prominent. The visiting First Lady's desire for a nice view had given us, and most importantly local villagers, a decent passage up and down.

Pakistan also boasts the region's greatest VIP road, and it really was intended for the people. The Motorway (it's always capitalised in the Pakistani papers) from Lahore to Islamabad was built under various governments led by Nawaz Sharif. A satirist once called it Mr Sharif's "Taj Mahal", an unfortunate reference given the ex-PM's current incarceration and the fate of Shah Jehan, tossed into the clink by his son for bankrupting the treasury to build his wife's mausoleum. But no matter how the people of Pakistan remember Nawaz Sharif, they quietly sing his praises as they whiz along the Motorway at 200 kmph, unthreatened by ox carts, cycle rickshaws and stray cattle (they are effectively banned, as is slow traffic of any kind). Mr Sharif may not have been able to pick his Army chiefs, but he apparently knew a thing or two about roads.

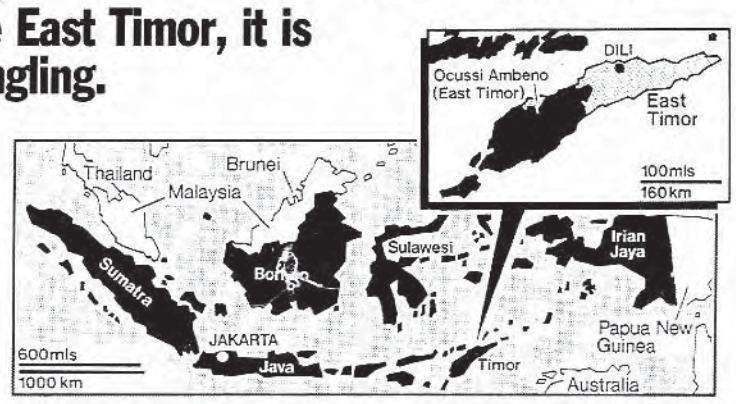
Which lets me end, I hope, on a serious note. It's a truism that roads lead to development when they connect markets with producers. The opposite also applies. Ask the Bhaktapur people about what happened to the economy of their city when they were left as a spur line on the highway to Tibet.

But the whole matter of roads is too important to be left to visiting VIPs, or politicians with delusions of grandeur or spiteful agendas. When the building of roads in South Asia becomes truly democratic, even if that means diverting a highway because a rare species of leech is threatened, then the region is on its way to progress. A smooth journey I trust. And, oh yes, I hereby issue an invitation to Prince Charles or Hillary Clinton to visit my home, any time they like. ♦

What went wrong in East Timor?

One year after the UN arrived to rescue East Timor, it is being blamed for wastefulness and bungling.

TOM FAWTHROP IN DILI



The spectacular sunset over Dili harbour has been obscured by a seafront intrusion. Floating hotel ships towed in by the United Nations loom over the landscape in the capital of East Timor, a country battered by violence a year ago.

The ships, the largest of which is named Hotel Olympia, have been chartered by the UN logistics department - a bureaucratic response to an accommodation crisis. Hotels and housing, like everything else, were destroyed by the post-referendum terror campaign unleashed in September 1999 by a vengeful Indonesian military and its pro-Jakarta militias. The arrival of the floating Hotel Olympia is to many locals a symbol of UN waste and lack of consultation. But there were other blunders. Among the first commitments was to build an administrative structure to run the country, but this was dominated by international civil servants and bureaucrats with no attempt to accommodate in any positions of authority the East Timorese who would eventually administer the new country. One of the sharpest criticisms of UN administration in East Timor came from within the UN itself. Professor Jarat Chopra resigned from the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) in protest at what he called "UN Czars who carved out bureaucratic fiefdoms without any genuine concern for the mission and the people of East Timor."

"Integral to repeated failures of peace missions is a hierarchical system that cannot be adapted to the novel mandates and the unique conditions of each deployment," wrote Professor Chopra in an article titled *The UN's Kingdom of East Timor* in the Autumn 2000 issue of the journal of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

East Timor marks the first time that the UN has been called upon to operate in a 'year zero' scenario, where the infrastructure has been totally destroyed, and assume full sovereignty on behalf of the population for a transitional period. Recent UN efforts in Cambodia and Kosovo have been quite different. In Cambodia the UN helped bring warring parties together and supervise a national election to ensure it was free and fair and see the return of democratic government. In East Timor, the experiment of running a UN transitional government for 2-3 years, until the local population is groomed for full independence, has been far less successful than the peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts there. Far more money has gone into peacekeeping than development. Many disillusioned East Timorese are insisting on UNTAET's immediate departure and independence ahead of time.

The UN's chief administrator in Dili, Sergio Vieira de Mello, has admitted some of the failures and has responded by introducing a policy of "Timorisation" - bringing local people into responsible positions. Representatives of the Timorese Resistance Movement, CNRT, have been given four ministerial portfolios.

The newly-formed joint international and Timorese La'o Hatumuk (East Timor Institute for Reconstruction and Monitoring) found that humanitarian relief had been fairly successful with good co-ordination between international NGOs and UN agencies to deliver food and shelter during the emergency period. The new era of political and cultural rights has created an air of freedom unknown for almost 25 years.

But although East Timorese now breathe the air of political freedom, economic recovery is a long way off. After the long drawn out deprivation as Indonesia's 27th province, now it is foreigners who are ready to line their pockets. Foreign businesses are savouring the taste of quick money to be made from contracts to service the foreign aid community.

Over $500 million have been pledged by international donor nations to rebuild and rehabilitate the devastated territory. Recently UNTAET's Vieira de Mello revealed that $680 million had been spent on peacekeeping, police and civic activities. In contrast, only $59 million had been allocated to rebuild East Timor and get development projects off the ground. Other grand promises of massive reconstruction aid from both multilateral and bilateral donors have not materialised. Last June, the highly-respected independence leader Xanana Gusmao threatened to boycott an international donors conference in Lisbon until UNTAET displayed some transparency about how they disbursed aid to East Timor. Today, two economies exist in East Timor: international aid fuels the dollar economy (both US and Australian dollars), but the Indonesian Rupiah is still the basis of the Timorese subsistence economy.

But six months after UNTAET administration, an estimated 75% of the people in the capital Dili are unemployed, leading inevitably to spiralling protests, crime and social unrest. ♦ *(Gemini News)*

Sri Lanka pre-poll warning

COLOMBO - Senior Cabinet Ministers contesting parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka have been cautioned by police of possible Tamil rebel attempts on their lives. The Inspector General of Police Lucky Kodithuwakku at a meeting with the ministers and senior members of the ruling People's Alliance (PA) government has issued guidelines for key candidates.

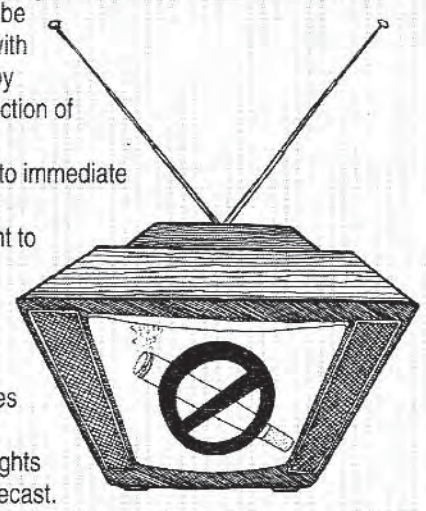
The Police Chief said the warning was being given based on intelligence reports they had collected during the past few months. With the election set for 10 October senior ministers who are contesting the poll have already commenced their campaign ignoring security precautions. Tamil rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 7 June assassinated the Industries Minister C.V.Gooneratne along with his wife and 21 others when a suicide bomber triggered off an explosion in the outskirts of the capital. As part of the security measures Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake will be provided with Presidential Security Division security which has more trained personnel.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is heading the PA campaign, also has restricted her election meetings compared to previous elections. She survived an LTTE attempt on her life during the Presidential election campaign in December last year, but lost her sight in one eye.

The main opposition party leader Ranil Wickramasinghe who heads the United National Party is also taking extra precautions during the campaign. The elections is being held throughout the country to elect 225 members to the Parliament for the next six years. *(dpa)*

Indian TV ban on cigarette, alcohol ads

NEW DELHI - India has introduced tough television regulations for domestic companies, barring liquor and tobacco advertisements on airtime. Information and Broadcasting Minister Arun Jaitley said no adult programmes can be shown at any time along with promotion of synthetic baby foods that resulted in reduction of breast feeding.



The new law comes into immediate effect after President K.R. Narayanan gave his assent to the bills that were passed earlier by parliament. The bill, that altered the earlier act passed in 1995, also makes it mandatory for cable operators to secure copyrights of all programmes they telecast.

This will particularly help the domestic film industry as one of the main reasons for most of feature films failing at the box-office of late has been that pirated versions are often screened by cable operators within hours of the films' commercial release. Sources said the law will only apply to Indian companies that uplink their shows from India.

In July, India decided to allow the establishment of a facility that could be used by foreign media and private television channels to uplink with communications satellites. India already allows downlinking by the television channels. At present, the government grants uplinking permission to overseas channels only for special occasions.

All private satellite television channels now uplink from abroad, mainly from Hong Kong, to cater to viewers in India. Observers said the domestic uplinking, among other things, would allow the government to enforce its views on programme content. *(dpa)*

"Leave Car at Home Day"

BANGKOK - Notorious for some of the world's worst traffic, Bangkok will join hundreds of European cities later this month with a "Leave Your Car at Home" day. On Friday, September 22, some 600 cities in 22 European countries will go carless in an attempt to clear the air and promote environmental awareness and energy conservation.

Pongpisit Wisetkul, director of the energy conservation and alternative energy division at Thailand's National Energy Policy Committee, said Bangkok will join the campaign to stress the need to limit the number of cars on city streets. Thailand, a net importer of petroleum products, has been hard hit by the recent increases in oil prices, which threaten to slow its economic recovery.

On the carless day, Bangkok drivers will be encouraged to use alternative transportation to get around town, such as bicycles. It was unclear whether authorities would also encourage the city's millions of noisy, polluting motorcycles to stay at home. *(dpa)*

Iran film wins in Venice

VENICE - The Venice Film Festival cited Iranian entry *Dayereh* (The Circle) by director Jafar Panahi as this year's winner of the Golden Lion as the best film. The Venice jury led by director Milos Forman cited the film for its portrayal of the difficulties faced by women in Iran.A special prize for the best directing went to Buddhadeb Dasgupta of India for the film *Uttara*. The award for best actress went to Rose Byrne for her performance in the Australian film *The Goddess of 1967*. Javier Bardem was named best actor for his role in *Before Night Falls*. *(dpa)*

Let's go to Prague

The Czech capital may see a repeat of the Battle of Seattle next week.

KEN LAIDLAW IN LONDON

Protestors from around the world are gearing up to hold a counter-summit next week in Prague to coincide with the first-ever IMF-World Bank annual meeting to be held outside Washington.

The protestors' summit will highlight what they say is the harmful side of economic globalisation, the controversial policy of free trade and free capital flow, which the two Washington-based bodies have pursued with vigour. The planned protests follow huge demonstrations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Seattle last year - the so-called Battle of Seattle - and at the spring meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Washington in April this year.

The aim of the protestors - some 50,000 gathered in Seattle last year - is to focus on the 'worst practices' of the three multilateral organisations. All three are perceived as favouring wealthy nations and to be in need of a much more participatory decision-making process. They are charged with lacking credibility, being remote, undemocratic, secretive and unable to respond to the challenge of world poverty.

After the demonstrations in Washington last April, Juliette Beck, co-ordinator of Global Project, a human rights group, wrote in *The Washington Post:* "This protest may go down in history as the watershed event that sparked an unprecedented global revolution against unmitigated corporate power." Now, round two of the protests is set to confront an expected delegation of 20,000 international bankers, economists and investors. With a major media presence also expected, the scenic East European city will form the perfect backdrop for one more anti-globalisation demonstration.

The Prague 'Initiative' states that some 40,000 members of the global financial oligarchy - financial and corporate institutions - control 80% of the world's trade. Possessions of the world's 200 richest people are worth more than the total income of 41% of the population of this planet.

Protesters argue that any successful large-scale debt relief or anti-poverty programme would require more resources from the wealthy nations. Yet, the United States - in the throes of an economic boom - gives little more than one-tenth of one percentage point of its total economic output as non-military aid. Even the World Bank admits there is little hope for improvement.

Its World Development Report released last year concludes that, "if current trends continue, the international development goals of reducing by half the proportion of people in extreme poverty by 2015 will not be met." Nor would the primary education target of full enrolment by the same year, a goal set by the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in 1995. Protestors blame the three organisations for encouraging economic globalisation, which they say has blocked efforts to reduce poverty. "Within the framework of the so-called Structural Adjustment Programmes, the IMF and the World Bank enforce strict conditions for providing loans to developing countries – (economic) deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation," said Prague-based 'Initiative'.

Globalisation: troubling trends

"These institutions have turned countries.... into 'colonies' of multinational corporations that want access to cheap labour and natural resources," said Juliette Beck. The anti-WTO movement, after its success in Seattle, has expanded its sights to take on the IMF and the World Bank as the main agencies promoting globalisation.

Protestors also claim that the IMF and World Bank are too busy promoting the interests of multinational corporations to care about the poor.

The protestors' message in Prague is very clear: globalisation has not led to economic benefits for all, as was promised by its advocates. Rather, poverty, hunger and landlessness have risen. Social unrest is unprecedented, the economies of most countries are in shambles and the planet is on the brink of environmental catastrophe. ♦ *(Gemini News)*

To be a millionaire

Blame the British. The simple game show they started in September 1998 has replicated like bacteria in warm agar. "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" has turned into a global subculture, with 27 licensed versions being broadcast in 29 countries.

Dozens more countries have already bought franchise rights from the show's British creator, Celador Productions, and there are, of course, at least a few unlicensed knockoffs. So far, the format remains the same, with contestants facing questions worth escalating amounts of money. At least half the fun for the show's fans is kvetching about how easy the questions are, and how, if they were on the show, they'd win that million dollars, easy. That scornful pleasure, too, is spreading around the globe. But just how common is common knowledge? Here's your chance to see whether you, too, could be a crorepati, a multi-miljonair, a miljonaariksi, a milliardario . . .

—Andrea Kannapell

Britain

Title: Who Wants to Be a Millionaire
Top prize: 1 million pounds ($1.5 million)
Host: Chris Tarrant, radio personality

1. Starting with the earliest, put these four Archbishops of Canterbury in order.
A. George Carey B. Thomas a Becket C. Robert Runcie D. Saint Augustine

2. In Victorian times, what was a "penny-farthing"?
A. Stamp B. Sweet C. Bicycle D. Newspaper

3. What kind of animal is Rikki-Tikki-Tavi in the Rudyard Kipling story?
A.Cobra B. Tiger C. Mongoose D. Bear

(1. DBCA, 2. C, 4. C.)

India

Title: Kaun Banega Crorepati (Who Wants to Be a Crorepati?)
Top prize: 1 crore, or 10 million rupees (about $218,000)
Host: Amitabh Bachchan, film star

1. Start from the oldest arrange these sons of Kunti (a female character in the epic Mahabharata*) in order.*
A. Bhima B. Yudhishtira C. Arjuna D. Karna

2. In (the film) Aradhana, *which vehicle is Rajesh Khanna traveling in while singing the song "Mere sapano ki rani kab ayegi tu (Queen of my dreams, when will you come to me?)"?*
A. Autorickshaw B. Jeep C. Cycle D. Motorbike

3. Which of these has served as the chief election commissioner of India?
A. P.N. Haskar B. Montek Singh Ahluwalia C. T.N. Seshan D. R.K. Dhawan

(1. DBAC, 2. B, 3 .C.)

Hungary

Title: Legyen on is Milliomos (You Can Be a Millionaire)
Top prize: 25 million forint ($87,750)
Host: Ishtvan Vagao, veteran quiz show host

1. Which literary hero makes a contract with Mephisto?
A. Phaedra B. Faust C. Rastignac D. Raskolnikov

2. Who is the mother of Romulus and Remus according the mythology?
A. A wolf B. Juno C. Minerva D. Rhea Silvia

3. What is the name of Sherlock Holmes' partner?
A. Dr Doolittle B. Dr Watson C. Dr Alban D. Dr Frankenstein

(1.B,2.D,3.B.)

Finland

Title: Haluatko Miljonaariksi (Do You Want to Be a Millionaire)
Top prize: 1 million markka (about $153,000)
Host: Lasse Lehtinen, ex-parliament member

1. Starting with the smallest, put these bra sizes in order:
A. D B. C C. B D. A

2. If it is noon in Johannesburg, what time is it in Turku, Finland?
A. 11:00 B. 12:00 C. 13:00 D. 14:00

3. How many stars are on the European Union flag?
A. 8 B. 10 C. 12 D. 20

(1.ABCD, 2. B, 3. C)

Israel

Title: Mi Rotza Leihot Millionaire (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire)
Top prize: 1 million new shekels ($247,800)
Host: Yoram Arbell, sportscaster

1. Who from the following in the Bible was swallowed by the earth?
A. Pharaoh B. Bilam C. Korach D. Yona

2. Which prime minister was the youngest, the day he started his position?
A. Benjamin Netanyahu B. Ehud Barak C. Yitzhak Rabin D. Levi Eshkol

3. What was the birthplace of Ra'shi, the Bible & Talmud commentator?
A. Russia B. Spain C. France D. Morocco

(1.C, 2. A, 3. C)

Australia

Title: Who Wants to Be a Millionaire
Top prize: 1 million Australian dollars ($595,000)
Host: Eddie McGuire, sportscaster

1. What is Australia's largest bird of prey?
A. Barn owl B. Peregrine falcon C. Wedge-tailed eagle D. Goshawk

2. "Solid Rock" was a hit song in the early 1980s for which Australian band?
A. Redgum B. The Dingoes C. Goanna D. Midnight Oil

3. Which Australian cricketer recently admitted making dirty phone calls to a British nurse?
A. Shane Warne B. Steve Waugh C. Mark Waugh D. Austin Powers

(1.C, 2. C, 3. A.)

South Africa

Title: Who Wants to Be a Millionaire
Top prize: 1 million rand ($144,600)
Host: Jeremy Maggs, news anchor and morning show host

1. Which word do fans commonly use when a South African soccer team scores a goal?
A. Ayta! B. Ahyay! C. Laduma! D. Eish!

2. Whose first novel was The Lying Days*?*
A. J.M. Coetzee B. Nadine Gordimer C. Andre Brink D. Breyten Breytenbach

3. Which horse won the 1968 South African Guineas at the restrictive odds of one to four?
A. Colorado King B. Sea Cottage C. Sentinel D. Hawaii

(1. C, 2. B., 3. D.)

(The New York Times)

South Centre rebukes Annan report

GENEVA - An inter-governmental organisation of developing countries has denounced the Millennium Summit report by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, saying its analyses and prescriptions are too broadly attuned to the dominant views and interests of the industrialised North.

The South Centre says the report, titled "We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century," ignores the views and concerns of the developing nations of the South. The Secretary-General distributed the document last April with the intention that it would serve as the basis for discussions among heads of state at the Millennium Summit last week.

Another recent report by Annan, about poverty in the world and proposals to overcome it, also triggered objections by representatives of governments of developing nations and of civil society organisations involved in the issue.

This poverty study, presented at the UN Social Summit in Geneva in June, was prepared jointly with the international Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a bloc of industrialised nations. *(IPS)*

Bush Jr gaffes worry supporters

WASHINGTON – US Republican presidential nominee George W. Bush is cutting an ever sorrier figure these days compared with up-and-coming Al Gore. The Texas governor is in the process of irritating the national media, ruining his campaign platform with squabbles over trivialities and spreading panic among the party faithful.

Bush's latest tactical mistake was his refusal to agree to take part in three half-hour, televised debates with the vice president—a stance that left the governor wide open to criticism that he was a "big baby" and a coward. The bi-partisan Commission on Presidential Debates has sponsored the quadrennial Q&A session since the 1988 campaign and the 90-minute debates are carried by all major US television networks.

Gore is willing to submit to the strict rules of the formal commission debates that 50 to 90 million Americans tuned in to during the last presidential campaign. Bush, however, said he would like the verbal sparring to take place under the auspices of gossip gurus Larry King (CNN) and Tim Russert (NBC), whose average audience sizes do not usually exceed 5.5 million viewers.

The debate debacle followed on the heels of another recent faux pas that analysts agreed smacked of political amateurism. Speaking to running mate Dick Cheney near a microphone the governor thought was dead, Bush called a *New York Times* reporter a "major-league asshole". He has not apologised for the comment, remarking defiantly: "I said what I said. I'm a plainspoken fellow."

Not since the summer of 1999—when reports were rampant of Bush's "major-league" narcotics and alcohol consumption—has the press been so unanimously critical in its coverage. *(Die Welt)*

UN to overhaul peacekeeping

NEW YORK – The United Nations Security Council is to overhaul its much-maligned peacekeeping operations, with special focus on conflicts in Africa. The council rushed through a six-step programme after suffering the embarrassment of seeing 500 of its peacekeeping force taken hostage by ramshackle rebel forces in Sierra Leone this year. The speed of the UN response is a sign of the extent to which the organisation's image has been battered by a decade of disastrous operations.

At a 90-minute meeting, the 15-member Security Council backed the plan. Attending were representatives of the five permanent members: the US president, Bill Clinton, the British prime minister, Tony Blair, the Chinese president, Jiang Zemin, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and the French president, Jacques Chirac.

The reform of the peacekeeping operations was recommended in a report by a UN panel of experts a fortnight ago after investigations into why the UN had performed so badly in Rwanda and the Balkans. The Security Council has since acted with unprecedented haste.

The declaration will be the one concrete success to emerge from the biggest-ever gathering of world leaders in New York. As a first step in reform, the security council will adopt "clearly defined, credible, achievable and appropriate mandates". *(The Guardian)*

Better lives for McHens

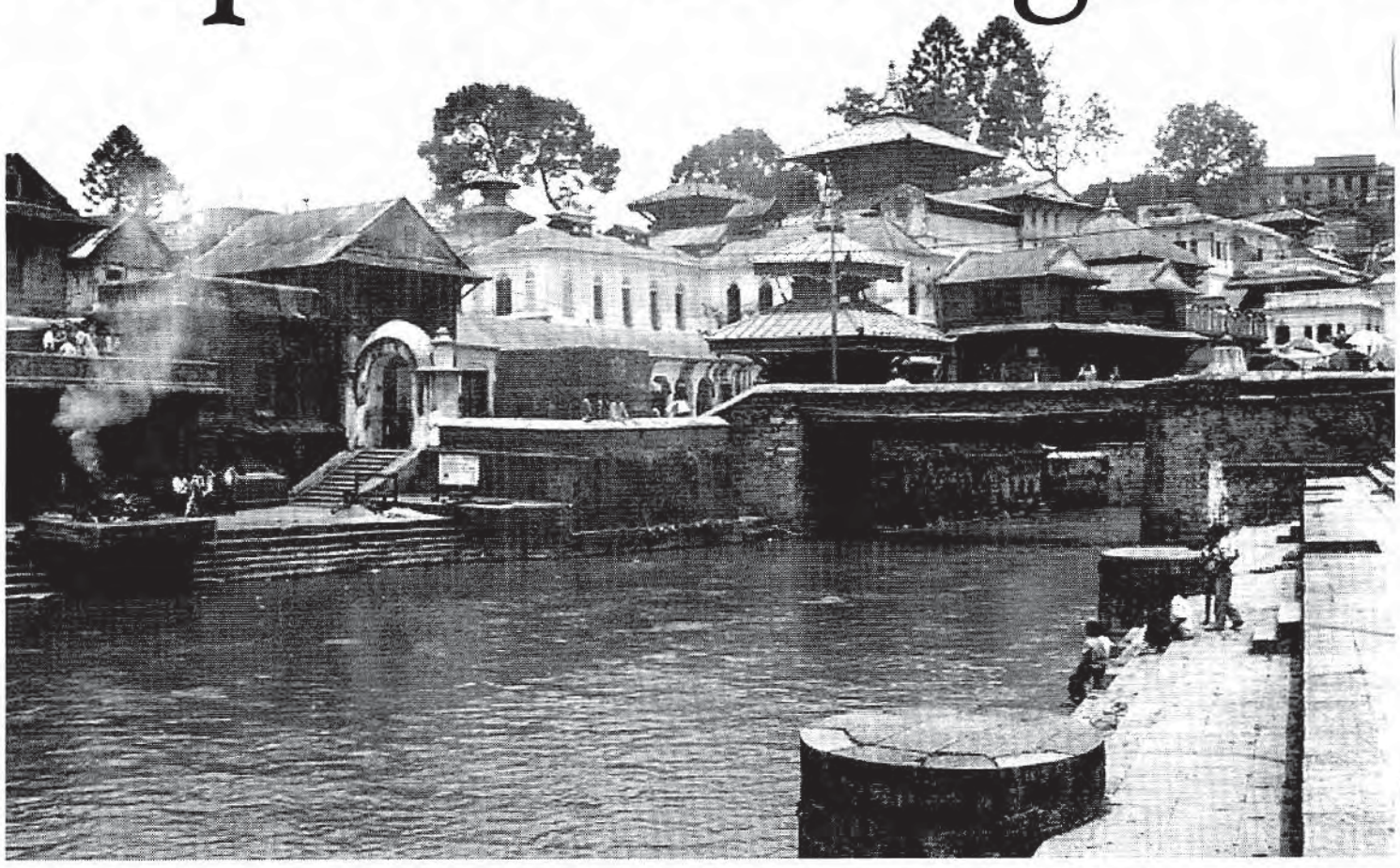
LONDON – It could be called the Chicken Run effect. McDonald's, bogey-figure to environmentalists and vegetarians throughout the world, finds itself under fire from the American egg industry for being too soft-hearted towards hens with its new requirements for egg farmers.

McDonald's, anxious perhaps to repair its somewhat tattered reputation with those concerned with animal welfare, has introduced new conditions that egg producers must meet if they wish to supply the corporation with eggs for its McMuffins. Egg producers must cease immediately the practice of withdrawing food and water to stimulate egg production, end beak trimming and, by the end of 2001, increase the space allotted to a hen by 50 per cent to 460 sq cms or 20cm by 23cm.

The British "claymation" film comedy, *Chicken Run*, which tells the story of hens escaping from hellish conditions, has been a popular hit in the US and has been credited with helping to raise the issue of battery hens. *(The Guardian)*

A trickle of hope on the Bagmati

With two projects working side-by-side, it may not be long before clean water flows in the Bagmati at Pashupati.



MIN BAHADURSHAH

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

When the Bagmati Area Sewage Construction/Rehabilitation Project was announced five years ago, there were only a handful who believed that the project would restore the Bagmati to its original pristine condition. With a mandate to clean up the Bagmati from Sundarijal to Chobhar, there was a lot the Project could do to transform the Valley's principal river from the sewer it is at present. Three projects chiefs and Rs 310 million later, the Bagmati remains as polluted as ever.

But things may be about to change for the better. At least in the stretch that flows by the holy Pashupati Temple Complex. In its first and second phases, the Project concentrated on the Bagmati above the Pashupati area, given the religious significance the river has to Hindus as it flows by the cremation area at Aryaghat.

The plan is to set up a sewage treatment plant beyond the Gujeswori temple at Tamraganga, to which all the sewers between Gokarna and Mitra Park will be connected. (The sewers empty directly into the Bagmati at present.) The treated water was to be carried through a 522-metre tunnel under the Mrigasthali hill and released into the Bagmati at Tilganga. Work on the tunnel was begun by a Nepali company but it later pulled out citing lack of technical knowhow. The Chinese company that took over has so far completed 227 metres, and construction work is going on at both ends of the tunnel.

Initially, it had been suggested that during the dry season the treated water from the plant would be used to flush the Bagmati. But the idea was dismissed after the *Mul Bhatta* (head priest) of Pashupatinath opposed it saying the treated water may be clean but not "pure and holy".

Meanwhile, the project cost has risen from its earlier estimate of Rs 460 to Rs 500 million, and the deadline for the two phases has been extended by a year from the original July 2000. Project officials are confident they will be able to complete the work in time. Says Bidur Poudel, chairman of the project, "All the work of the first and second phase will be completed by early next year. The tunnel will be completed by next July and the treatment plant will be operational by March."

What is not clear, however, is how the flow will be maintained after the project is completed and the Bagmati cleaned up. The water level is never particularly high above the Pashupati, mainly because Bagmati water is siphoned off at Sundarijal for public distribution by the Water Supply Corporation.

While the project insists alternatives such as boring deep wells are being looked into, it does not look particularly promising. Which is why a second scheme, the Ganga Aryaghat Project, comes almost as a complement. The Ganga project has been initiated by industrialist Binod Chaudhary, who was shocked by the state of the Bagmati when he had to cremate his mother earlier this year.

Says Bhusan Tuladhar, the team leader, there has to be constant flow of water in Bagmati. "We plan to clean the Bagmati water. We will be bringing water from the Dhap area (in the Indrawati watershed near Sundarijal) and mix it to the Shyalmati river (a tributary of the Bagmati). The second thing we're doing is to build another water reservoir above the existing one and bring that water through a 13-km pipeline to Aryaghat," says Tuladhar.

With two projects working towards similar ends, there is some confusion. But Tuladhar brushes it aside. "There shouldn't be any confusion regarding our work as we're concentrating only on Aryaghat area," he says. "Our working area is from Suryaghat and Raj-Rajeshwarighat, both within the Pashupati complex."

Lately, the Chaudhary project has also come under flak for naming the project "Ganga", after his mother. But Binod Chaudhary feels the name issue has been unnecessarily blown up. "A project is always temporary and its name would cease to exist once it is complete. After all, we are not proposing that we rename Aryaghat itself."

Amidst work on the two projects, there are some who want to look beyond and offer a more comprehensive plan. Among them is Gopal Shiwakoti "Chintan", who says there should be wider involvement for a cleaner Bagmati. "Since it is also a heritage site, UNESCO should be included and there must be a master plan which cover all aspects of Bagmati," he says.

Another activist, Hutaram Baidya, involved in the "Better Bagmati" campaign for some years now, says, "Apart from the master plan, we should also think about the sustainability of these projects after their completion."

MIN BAHADURSHAH

The Aryaghat in the monsoon (top) and view of the Pashupati Temple Complex from atop Mrigasthali hill.

The bigger challenge for the Bagmati Sewerage Construction/Rehabilitation Project will be to clean the Bagmati flow throughout the Valley. Project head Poudel says, "After the completion of the first and second phase, the project will go for the third and fourth, that is, from Tilganga to Chobhar gorge."

Given its track record, nothing much should be expected of Project anytime soon, but at least there is a distinct possibility that devotees will soon be able to take a truly holy dip at Aryaghat. ♦

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Team Nepal

The Sydney Olympiad is the 10th Olympics Nepal is taking part in. Success has so far been elusive, and no one expects anything different of the five who will be representing Nepal at the Games beginning 15 September. But for the athletes, to be included in the country's Olympic squad is in itself a lifetime's ambition. "It's the greatest thing that can happen," says young swimmer Runa Pradhan.

Given below are short profiles of our five Olympians, all of whom are participating in the Olympics for the first time.

Gyan Bahadur Bohara
Age - 27
Event - 5000m
Best timing - 14:50.10
National record - 14:34.43
Olympic record - 13:05.60
World record - 12:39.40

Undoubtedly the best Nepali middle-distance runner of this decade, Gyan Bahadur missed the gold by just one second at the last South Asian Federation (SAF) Games. The SAF silver, however, helped him clock his best timing of 14:50.10. A versatile runner, Gyan Bahadur used to run the10,000m, 5000m and the marathon, but he has now begun concentrating on 5000m. At the moment, the Royal Nepal Army serviceman is running under 14:50. Says the chief athletics coach, Bishwa Thapa, Gyan Bahadur is capable of setting a new national record in Syndey.

Devi Maya Paneru
Age - 22
Event - 100m
Best timing - 12.17 (national record)
Olympic record - 10.62
World record - 10.49

Now in the prime of her career, Devi Maya Paneru hopes to become the first Nepali woman to run 100m under 12 seconds. Her best so far is 12.17 sec, set at the last SAF Games. The sprinter from Nepal Police idolises Marion Jones and hopes to gather invaluable experience competing against world-class runners at the Olympics. Devi arrived in the national scene five years ago at the National Athletics Championship and has since established an enviable record in the domestic circuit. Winner of four gold medals at the 4th National Games held in Nepalgunj in 1999, Devi has participated in the 7th SAF Games and the 1997 World Athletics Championship in Athens.

Bhagwati K.C.
Age - 27
Event - 10m Air Rifle
Best result – 388 (national record)
Olympic record - 397
World record - 399

A teacher of disabled children, Bhagwati K.C. got a wild card entry to Sydney. Though she didn't perform well in the 8th SAF Games, her performance at the 1998 Bangkok Asiad, where she scored 377, was good enough for her to find a place in the Olympic team. Bhagwati has been competing at the national level for the last 11 years. This shooter from Baglung has been notching 390 during practice sessions and is confident of doing well at Cecil Park (the shooting venue).

Runa Pradhan
Age - 16
Event - 50m freestyle
Best Timing - 31.70 (national record)
Olympic record - 24.79
World record - 24.39

Sixteen is a pretty young age to compete at world sports meets, but not for swimmers and gymnasts. And teenager Runa Pradhan, who comes from a family of swimmers in Kathmandu, is ready for the challenge. Runa is delighted to be going to Sydney, where she hopes to meet world-class swimmers like Alexander Popov and Ian Thorpe, of whom she is a great fan.

Chitra Bahadur Gurung
Age - 30
Event - 50m freestyle
Best timing - 27.28
National record – 26.58
Olympic record - 21.91
World record - 21.39

The oldest among the five, armyman Chitra Bahadur Gurung will have the honour of carrying the country's flag at the opening ceremony. Chitra made his debut at the national swimming championship in 1992, winning gold in the 50m freestyle. Since then, he has been representing Nepal at various international swimming meets, notably the 5th FINA World Championship, the 8th SAF games and 13th Asia-Pacific Age Group Swimming Meet. His best timing in the pre-Olympic practice sessions is 27.64. ♦

Down and out down under

Thoroughly demoralised, five Nepali athletes are going to Sydney accompanied by 21 officials.

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

Controversy has always dogged Nepali sports and the preparations for Sydney 2000 is no exception. This time, the debate is regarding the size and composition of the Nepali contingent. There are four times more officials than athletes. The latest score is five athletes, one coach and 20 officials. (For comparison, the Sri Lankan delegation consists of 19 athletes and 11 officials.)

Except for five athletes and the single coach, all the others going to Sydney are administrative staff from the Nepal Olympic Committee (NOC) and the Nepal Sports Council (NSC). The NOC and NSC don't have any explanation, although they have tried to justify it by saying that the officials are needed for "administrative reasons".

The real purpose seems to be tourism. Particularly striking is the fact that there is only one coach. Rukma Shumsher Rana, president of NOC, says the composition of the contingent was decided by the NOC after discussions with the NSC. "We decided to take one coach because we had only one coach in the last Olympics," Rana told us.

Nepali sports officials have said time and again that the most important thing is to take part, not to win. That certainly holds true for this delegation: bureaucrats are not going to win any medals. There is also a row between Rukma Shumsher and Binod Shankar Palikhe for leadership of Nepal's Olympic squad. Palikhe, as NSC member-secretary, is chef de mission for Sydney 2000, but he says all his powers have been given to Anil Sharma, NOC member.

Rukma Shumsher insists that NOC hasn't overlooked Palikhe. "Since the Finance Ministry released the money at the last minute on Thursday and there was little time left, NOC was given the responsibility," he said. But according to rules, it is NSC which has to take charge.

One thing is clear: the row between NSC and NOC is now public. And another bone of contention is the daily allowance for athletes. Initially, Rukma Shumsher and NOC general secretary, Dhruva Bahadur Pradhan, were to receive $100 each and other officials, including Palikhe, were to get $22.5, while the athletes, had been allocated a mere $8. After the athletes refused to accept the meagre allowance, it was increased to $17.50, just a day before the team left for Sydney on 11 September.

The Finance Ministry released Rs 3 million for the trip, but Rukma Shumsher says this amount is not enough and says NOC will have to dip into its kitty for another Rs 350,000. Sources at the Ministry said Rs 8.9 million was released for Crown Prince Dipendra and his entourage of five, which left for Sydney on 10 September.

All this bickering over money would have been fairly normal by Nepali standards. But what has suffered is the morale of the athletes. On Friday, 5,000m runner Gyan Bahadur Bohara was practising in the army ground instead of the synthetic track of Dasharath Stadium because it was closed. Shooter Bhagawati K.C. has a six-year-old rifle to compete with in Sydney. Till Friday, athletes hadn't got their shoes and track suits.

So, what will the Nepalis do in Sydney? The athletes will make their appearance in the stadium, gain some exposure. And for the rest of those in the stadium, some sightseeing and lots of Foster's lager. It is sure that they won't be coming with the medals, but there will certainly be a lot of baggage. ♦

RUN-UP TO THE OLYMPICS

Chilly Sydney

The temperature Tuesday morning in Sydney: 10 degrees. The first modern Olympics to be held in the southern hemisphere didn't bargain for one thing, it's winter down under.

Bemittened marching band members struggle with shiny sousaphones, athletes queue for extra blankets at the Olympic Village, foreign journalists in the chilly Main Press Centre bemoan not packing jumpers. It's all part of the weather roulette, which has seen storms scare sailing and canoeing competitors above all—and has the opening ceremony organisers speaking of their fear of thunder and lightning.

"They could stop the ceremony because there's so much high-tech involved," nervy officials admitted—only to be reassured that the latest forecast for the opening ceremony on 15 September is favourable. A "nice mild day" was the latest longer-range forecast for Friday of next week when the ceremony takes place—though followed by another of those "cool nights".

The latter could wreak special havoc with the highly-sensitive men and women sprinters who will be doing battle for track and field's most coveted medals at 8 pm local time on 23 September. If temperatures continue to drop to around 10 degrees Celsius then, as they have been, the risks of injury to susceptible muscles will increase dramatically. And you can forget about any records.

On top of all this the main Olympic complex at Homebush Bay, where 14 different sports will be staged, has the reputation of being Sydney's windiest point. *(dpa)*

Fans queue for remaining tickets

Olympic fans queued up for more than a kilometre this week to snatch up the remaining 150,000 tickets for some of the Olympics' top events. Sydney Olympic organisers said the rush for the final tickets still could push the Olympic committee into profits for the two-week sporting spectacle.

Officials said last week they still need to sell some US$ 57 million in tickets to reach the black. One of the hottest tickets going were those for the 1,500m swimming final, which will include local hero Kieren Perkins, who won gold at the 1992 and 1996 Games. The 7,500 tickets for that event sold out in two hours.

Tickets for the basketball test showdown between Dream Team 4 of the United States and Australia Saturday night in Melbourne Park sold out in less than an hour. *(dpa)*

Australia's "Olym-pique"

An Australian revolt gathered pace on the weekend over a demand from the International Olympic Committee that French take precedence over English at the 15 September opening ceremony of the Sydney Games.

Governor-General Sir William Deane has refused a request from IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch that he declare the Games open in French on 15 September. French and English, in that order, are the official Olympic languages.

The queen's representative in Australia has modern history on his side: only the language of the host country was used in the opening ceremonies for the Winter Games in Lillehammer and Nagano and the Summer Games in Atlanta.

Taking her cue from the governor-general, broadcaster Mary Kostakidis has withdrawn as master of ceremonies for the opening of an IOC conference at Sydney's Opera House after organisers demanded she speak in French first and then in English. "I guess it's a matter of principle over protocol," Kostakidis said. "We are in Australia, the majority of the people in the concert hall for this event would speak English and I thought it was a matter of principle to speak English."

French speakers are thin on the ground in cosmopolitan Sydney, where English is the lingua franca, followed in popularity by Arabic and then Chinese. *(dpa)*

Sri Lanka's biggest-ever contingent

The biggest ever contingent to take part in Olympic games from Sri Lanka left for Sydney with the main concentration on track events. The 19-member contingent consisting of 14 track athletes, two swimmers, two shooters and a lone yachtsman are taking part in the events. They left country early on Wednesday.

The contingent includes IAAF World Championship Silver Medallist Susanthika Jayasinghe, who will be taking part in the 100 metre, 200 metre and the 100 metre-relay events. Another champion sprinter, Damayanthi Darsha, is the team captain.

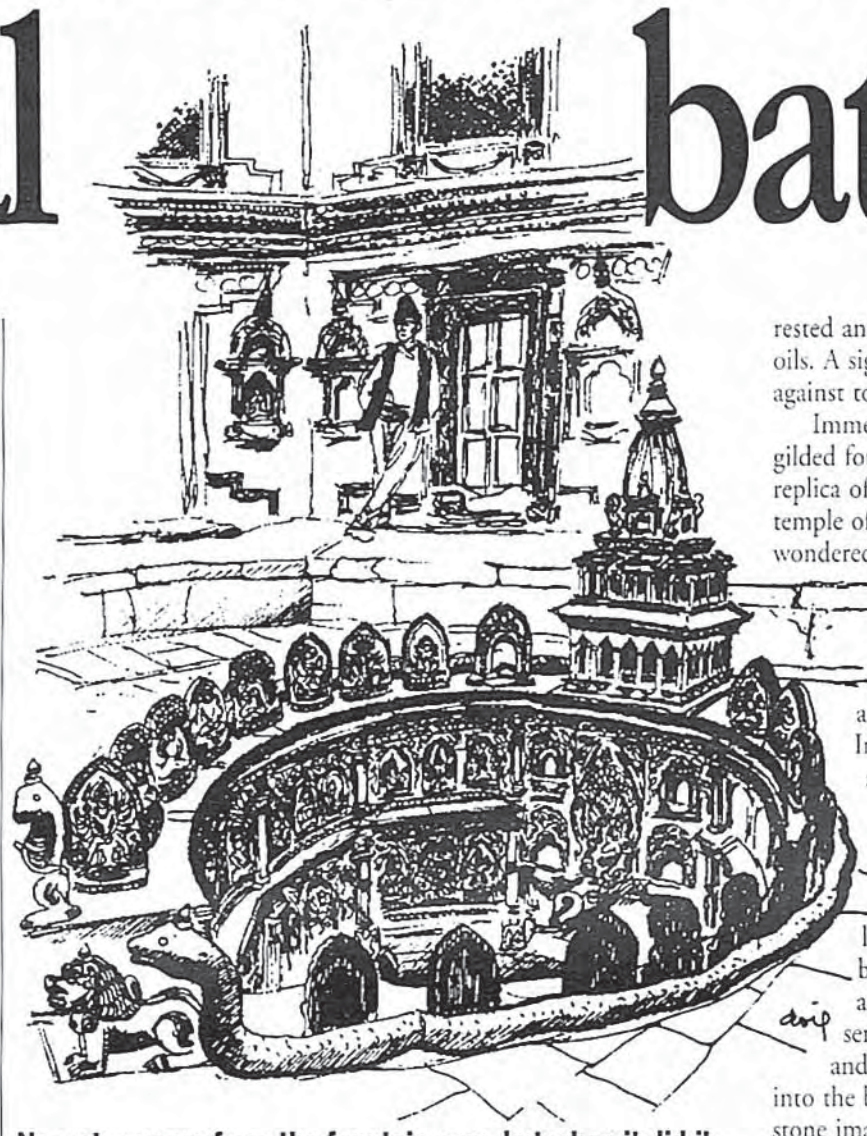
The contingent which is backed by 11 officials was given a colourful send off in the capital Colombo. The highest number to take part in an Olympic Games from Sri Lanka was at the 1992 Barcelona Games when it sent 11 members.

Sri Lanka has so far achieved success at an Olympic game only once when the late Duncan White won a Silver medal in the 1948 Olympic for the 200-metre hurdle event. *(dpa)*

SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

No water in the royal bath



No water pours from the fountain now, but when it did it was hot and perfumed, suitable for a monarch's pleasure.

I admit to being terrified by Sundari Chowk in the old Malla palace of Patan. Not physically, but as an artist. The wealth of design, the amazing detail, the intricate perspectives have foiled many an attempt to sketch or paint the royal bath that lies at the centre of the courtyard. Besides, the continuous stream of tourists is intimidating. There is just so much one can take of having one's work critically scrutinised in several languages. So when I had I went late, at a time when the great tourist coaches are pointed back towards Kathmandu. And I went with determined friends who found me a chair and kept tourists at bay by suggesting I accepted traveller's cheques, cash, and Diners Cards in any strong currency for my sketches. It worked. I was viewed from a distance, even photographed, but otherwise ignored. Only the challenging bath remained. If I balked at even an impressionistic study, what headaches or what blazing inspiration its 17th century creator must have endured, I would guess he spent lifetime at it.

The bath, set at the centre of a small, extravagantly decorated courtyard, is shaped like a *yoni* with steps leading down from the narrow end. Profusely decorated with three tiers of brilliant stone carving—gods and goddesses mostly and a wealth of floral design—the gilded fountain is an even greater masterpiece. Vishnu and Lakshmi ride a *garuda* which in turn rests on fishes and crocodiles, turtles and sea monsters. Below the fountain, stone elephants battle. About it four elegantly carved niches stand empty, their images removed by vandals. "I remember when they were all complete," volunteered a young shopkeeper who watched me sketch a while. "The others were here too," he said, indicating more empty niches and stands, particularly one which must have contained an exquisite gilded image. Only fragments remain.

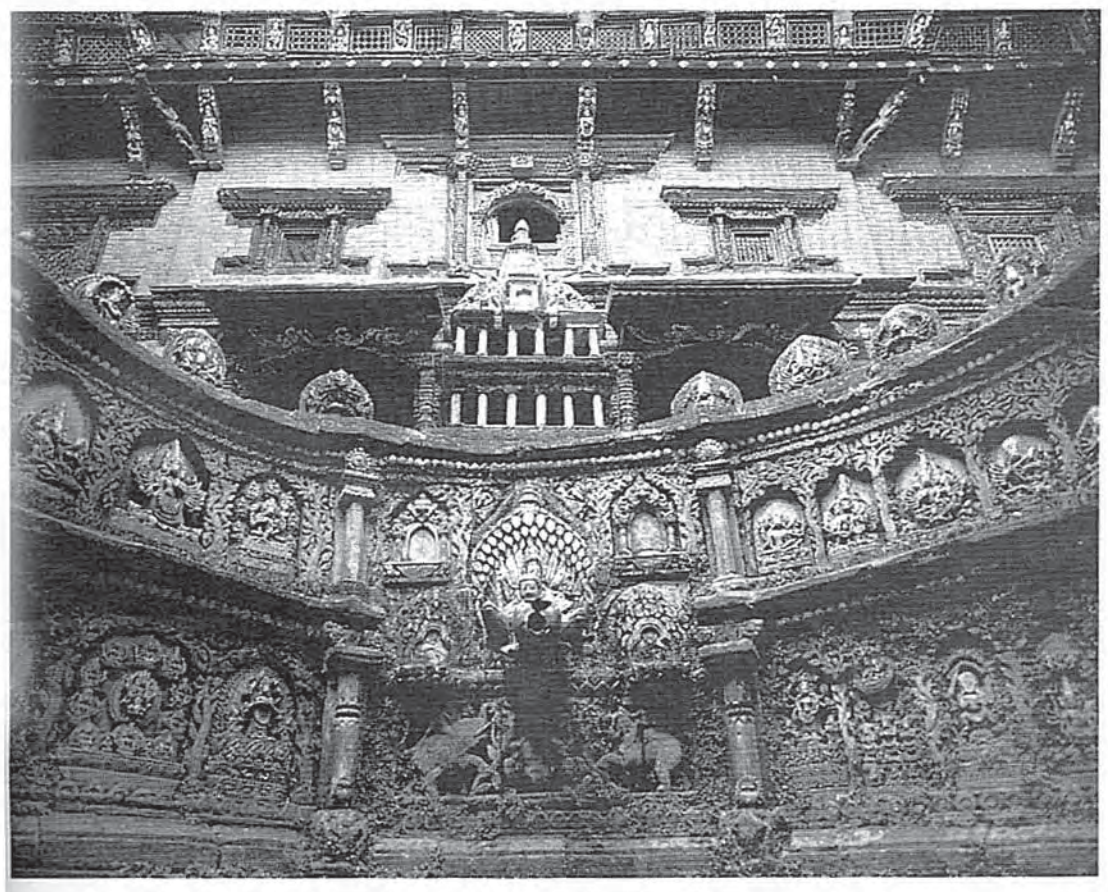
No water pours from the fountain now, but when it did it was hot and perfumed, suitable for a monarch's pleasure. But I wonder, and no one I have met or nothing I have read stands to correct me, whether the actual procedure of royal bathing in Sundari Chowk was functional or purely ceremonial. I cannot conceive of a king bathing in the open air in Kathmandu's greatly variable climate unless he was obeying the dictates of some ritual even if the water was hot and his attendants immediately attentive with towels and wraps. Apparently, the whole court looked on while the queen and her ladies watched from behind carved wooden screens. If hearsay is to be believed, the king ascended from his bath to lie on a stone bed where he rested and was massaged with oils. A sign today warns visitors against touching the sacred bed.

Immediately above the gilded fountain is a small stone replica of the famed Krishna temple of Patan. When I wondered aloud why it was there, the obliging shopkeeper said it was because the king who had built the bath was a devotee of Krishna. Indeed he was the very same king who had the Krishna temple built following a dream in which he saw Krishna and Radha making love. Encircling the bath, their heads raised and plumed, are two serpents. Above the steps and looking respectfully into the bath is a vermilioned stone image of Hanuman who was propitiated before every royal dip. And apart from the numerous Hindu and Buddhist deities lining the bath itself there is a vast concourse of carved and painted gods on the buildings all about who observed the royal ablutions.

Until recent times most of Kathmandu valley took its baths at public springs. Though the underground water level has dropped and most springs have consequently run dry, there is a battery of ever-flowing springs in Kathmandu and Patan still immensely popular in all weathers So perhaps the comparatively private and beautiful Sundari Chowk was the only alternative royalty had to public baths. And Vishnu reincarnate being ritually bathed was surely an occasion of great interest to the court.

Police now guard the courtyard from further desecration. The tourists fill it in relays, endlessly capturing its charms on film I like to think that some of them will someday look unbelieving at their photographs of a handsome man bathing under a gilded fountain. Lunatic fantasy perhaps but dreaming comes easily in Sundari Chowk. Every carved and painted piece of wood, every flagstone and every one of its numerous images breathe history. Like the two modern women who strayed unbelievingly into Louis the XV's court at Versailles, someone will someday stumble into a royal Malla occasion. Where better than at the royal bath in Sundari Chowk? ♦

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



The Sundari Chowk in Patan last week. Visitors are not allowed while renovations are in progress.

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Manu Brajaki's muddled majority

Manu Brajaki is one of the most interesting short story writers today, playing with Nepal's mixed languages, pulling together disparate urban and rural subjects, and deftly managing the conflicting demands of art and political commentary. The story below shows off his brisk and bracing style, depicting without sentimentality the day-to-day quandaries of a Kathmandu everyman. More of Brajaki's work can be read in his collections Timri Swasni ra Ma, Aakashko Phal, *and* Bhavisya Yatra *(from which this story was excerpted).*

The weather will be clear today and tomorrow

Nepal Radio—ears!

Nepal Television—eyes!

Sri Nepal Video—brains!

Having a video deck in each house of a developing country is a matter of civil rights. I've finally discovered that once you have eyes and ears, you must have brains to think, reflect and develop.

To jiggle the brains a friend ordered yesterday, "Bring a partner! We'll watch a new kind of film in a completely new way. At one—and that's a.m., not p.m., you lout."

Since my own wife isn't here, I arrived alone. The video had already started. Bimal came out when I knocked. "You're alone?"

"Who could I bring?"

He beckoned reluctantly. "Never mind, come."

A *blue film* was being screened. As with *yellow journalism*, there's no Nepali term for *blue film*. How can there be a name without a lineage? Though there will be a lineage now: our priests won't lag behind in performing naming rituals. My eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness of the room. There were four couples there.

The science of sex was being displayed on the video.

All four couples were kneading each other.

With each man was someone's own sister, wife or mother.

I regretted my mistake. I could have arranged with New Road's middleman to bring Harimaya. She's an inexpensive whore, she would have been ready for twenty-five rupees. But the problem is, that whore lacks this kind of progressiveness. She needs seclusion, she needs the lights switched off.

I went out, my expression souring and my mind clouding.

When Bimal opened the door, he said, "Leaving, bastard traditionalist? Look, Sabita's calling you."

I didn't stay. I left, thinking of Sabita. This time she'll surely pass her BA.

It's truly a matter of civil rights to keep a video deck.

If a Gorkhali can keep a khukuri, why can't a Nepali keep a video deck?

But who am I asking this question to?

***

Catching a Japanese bus I reached Nepal, meaning Ratna Park, and when I emerged from a stop at the public toilets, the usual blind Gorkhali was singing his usual hymns, asking for money. I thought of giving him some change, but didn't. Bimal had called me a bastard and also a traditionalist. Ah, I must become progressive now, I mustn't be a humanist. I mustn't exhibit the arrogance of the rich by engaging in pity. So I gave nothing. Let him keep shouting, that ass of a blind Gorkhali. Nepalis are now watching videos in a new way, but this one, he's singing the same old hymns, begging for alms.

Pity is a hateful thing. So I cast a loving glance at a girl standing with a basket full of cucumbers and an upright knife. I gave a bill and received a cucumber slathered with salt and pepper. I didn't ask for change, she didn't give it. There was a rush.

To one side was a policeman-dai. Policemen aren't called bhai, since younger brothers don't have the right to mete out punishment. Such is our custom.

I had wanted to sit in the park, but I bought a newspaper and scanned it. There was some support, lots of opposition. I thought of the editor. He bore no opposition towards anyone. When you oppose, you're considered a journalist in front of the world. Also a leader. You become Gandhi and Lenin. Gandhi had said, "You must accept rods and bullets without uttering a word." Lenin had said, "You must give rods and bullets without uttering a word." I had said...what had I said? Ah: "The bamboo used for rods and the lead used for bullets must be offered to the gods, in the place of flowers."

How philosophical I had become!

Leave all this; in a park, one must fall in love.

I looked ahead of me. There was Bir Hospital, where one might courageously give up one's life force.

In all my life I've never fallen in love and so I've become an idler.

A eucalyptus tree to the side smiled nakedly.

In one corner of the greenhouse, a sneaky boy opened his drawstrings.

On this side, a dark southern man stripped a pale northern man of his purse.

This is not a poem.

Five years ago, Kabita had said, "This won't do: either become a communist and go to Russia-China, or become Congress and circle India-America, or become a Pancha and erect a building right here. Only then can you come to nudge at me."

Neither is this a poem.

And so: in front of Kabita, I stayed an old man with my hands and asked, "Old father! Are you a communist?"

"No, son."

"And are you Congress?"

"Um...no."

"You're not a Pancha?"

"How can those like us be Panchas?"

For over an hour, I held onto Kabita's arms and asked five other people these same questions, but none called themselves these three things. Swelling like a rooster, I said, "You see, Kabita *darling*, I'm on the side of the majority."

"I don't need your hungry, naked and hick majority. All over the world, it's the minority who has fun on the seat of power. You're a goat sitting on a bench, till Dashain. Now stop complaining, I'm leaving, *bye-bye, ta-ta*."

Within five years, the minority had squeezed Kabita dry of all her fun and tossed her back in the ocean of the majority. Yesterday I saw her with a *driver* boy at unsightly Baudha, this side of scenic Gokarna. She was asking for fifty, and the *driver* boy was swearing by his religion that he couldn't go above twenty.

The majority takes pity. The majority will always give at least twenty. ♦

ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

❖ Foreign

Super Cop – Tara (476092, 491703)

❖ Nepali

Basanti – Biswajyoti (221837), Krishna (470090), Prithivi

Bar Pipal – Ganga Chalchitra Mandir

Mailee – Ranjana (220091)

❖ Hindi

Gair – Ashok,

Fiza – Gopi, Goona (Ka) (520666), Manakamana, Metro

Tera Jadoo Chal Gaya – Goona (Kha) (520668)

Hamara Dil Aapke Pas Hai – Hira Ratna

Maut ke Samundar – Jai Nepal (411014)

Ramwati – Kumari

Toofan – Padma

Ye Kaisa Pyas – Plaza 1

Jawani ki Kahani – Shivadarshan

Refugee – Shri Nava Durga Chitra Mandir

Dhadkan – Tara (476092, 491703)

EXHIBITIONS

❖ **Photography-Thangmi.** An exhibition of black and white photographs by Sara Shneiderman, representing the Fulbright scholar's ethnographic work with the Thangmi (Thami in Nepal), a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group of 40,000 indigenous to Nepal's northeastern districts of Dolakha and Sindhupalchowk. Exhibition at the Bamboo Gallery. 10-5 pm. From 10-20 September. 412507

❖ **Painting** - Nepali landscape oil paintings by Pramila Bajracharya at the Radisson Art Gallery. 411818

❖ **Installation.** An exhibition by two high-school girls from France displaying posters, artefacts, gastronomic treats, books and T-shirts on the French Alps. The Alliance Francaise Thapathali. 242832

MUSIC

❖ **Classical** - Musicians from Nepal and abroad perform on 13 September at Kirateshwar Temple, Pashupati. 4:00 to 8:00 pm. Free entrance. Organised by Kirateshwara Sangeet Ashram. 492139

❖ **Unplugged** - Live unplugged performance by Sabu Lama at Las Kus Restaurant Courtyard, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel from 6:30 p.m. onwards. 413632

❖ **Piano and percussion** - Piano, Drums and Double Bass performance by Budaprithi Trio band from 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. every day except Mondays at the Juneli Bar, Hotel De l' Annapurna, Durbar Marg. 221711

❖ **Pop** - Filipino band Spice and Ice playing at the Gurkha Grill, Soaltee Hotel. 7:30 pm onwards. Every day except Monday. 272555

❖ **Jazz** - Sunday Jazz featuring Chris Masand and the Jazz Commission at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant, Thamel. Sunday, September 17. 7-10 pm. 414336.

EVENTS

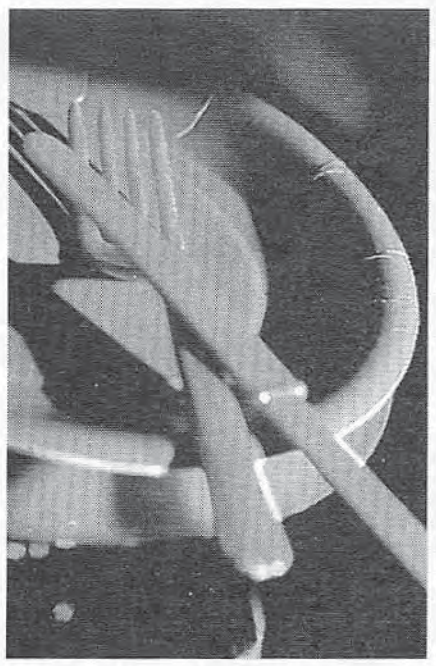
❖ **Kathmandu Utsav 2000.** The annual Dasain bazar on the Tundikhel grounds featuring Nationwide Musical Band Contest, Utsav Fashion Parade, The Grind, Bicycle Rally and more. From 11 till 17 Sept. Organised by Everest Exhibitions. 415712

FESTIVAL

❖ **Indra Jatra**-Occuring the week starting 12 September onwards (one week) Indra Jatra is a festival of classical dances. Named after Lord Indra, god of rain, it is celebrated among the Newari community with much singing, dancing and feasting for eight days in Kathmandu. The crowd gathered at Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu Durbar Square observe the processions of the living goddess, Mahakali, Mahalaxmi and Dasha Avatara. Ritual dancing by the Lakhe, the masked dancers. After the third day, the Kumari, the living goddess, is taken out in a procession for three consecutive days. The king also pays homage to the Kumari during this period. The place to be is the street between Kathmandu Durbar Square and Indra Chowk.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

Hungry Eye



Yeok Teck Chinese Vegetarian Restaurant
Ekantakuna Chowk (Tel: 527962)
Opening hours: Daily 11 am-9 pm
closed 6-7 pm
Tuesdays 11 am-5 pm

Rating: 👁👁👁

Price: $$

Yeok Teck Chinese Vegetarian Restaurant has a long name and a pretty unimpressive entrance—it could easily be an office space. That could be why not many people have discovered the tastebud thriller that lies just behind the big tree at Ekantakuna.

The first thing you see when you get to Yeok Teck is a group of Chinese people, their table piled high with exciting looking bowls and platters. This happy family are the restaurant owners from Malaysia, who eat dinner at the tables next to their clientele, nightly. It's a great concept—and feeling like we are truly part of the family we sit down and ask for some Chinese tea. Best bet at Rs 40 for a small pot, and unlimited added infusions of hot water. An additional authenticity, just like in any Cantonese Dai Pai Dong (streetside bhatti), the two little tea cups are brought in a lucky red bucket so that you can rinse them out once with the first hot swill of tea before drinking.

Yeok Teck's menu is fascinating, and no dish on the regular menu is more than Rs 100. At this vegetarian's paradise, you can gourmandise on mutton cooked in various ways, chicken curry, and even king prawns. All of these are carefully fashioned out of vegetable substitutes, and unless they had a sticker on them saying so, you would never guess. Just to be truly surreal, and have a meat overdose at a vegetarian restaurant that does not allow alcohol or smoking, we ordered the Nasi Lemak with chicken and the Rendang Mutton.

The Nasi Lemak turned out to be brilliantly hued rice with the requisite prawn crackers. The "chicken" was spectacular, with just the right amount of peanut-based spice. The "mutton" rendang was richly flavoured with a hint of coconut and cinnamon. Other exciting offerings that we could have tried but didn't have the space to, included: Lemon Chicken, Tom Yam Fish, Fried Curry Powder Mutton, Sweet & Sour Prawn, Sesame Oil Chicken, and Assam Fish.

Our veggie meat-fest over, we turned to the real vegetarian menu. Our teapot had been topped up several times by now, and eager to plunge into more delights we ordered the fresh mushrooms with seaweed. Crispy black strips of seaweed offset the succulent steamed mushrooms to perfection. The vegetable of the day in oyster sauce turned out to be genuine bak choy (Chinese spinach) flash fried in a wok. The sauce was light, with grated carrots to add body, and without masking the flavour with the usual MSG'd glop that some restaurants love to throw on every vegetable that crosses their chopping board. A pleasant change indeed to find a Chinese restaurant that really knows their vegetables, and serves them up crisp, nutritious and colourful.

In fact, all of the flavours are very Cantonese—relying on purity and simplicity for their taste. This is why the next dish we ordered, Yeok Teck's Guangdong Noodles, was simply out of this valley. No more battered noodles and squishy vegetables called "chowmein" for us; we're coming back to Yeok Teck every time we feel a noodle craving coming on. Brilliantly sauteed in a very light sauce, with greens and mushrooms, this dish was a complete hit.

We were very nearly full by this time, but since the teapot kept being refilled, and the family next to us continued to eat on with short breaks to cook and serve us, we were tempted to order one last dish—the Tom Yam fried rice. Similar to the fiery lemon-grass based soup it is named after, the fried rice came out flavourful and tangy. Portions are adequate for sharing, but on the small side, so luckily we were able to polish it off.

No room for dessert, and there weren't many vegetarian dessert choices on offer anyway. Overall, an unusual and excellent place for vegetarian Chinese food. Interesting menu choices, and if you get confused, just ask the family at the next table. Great service—quick, efficient and helpful—highly recommended. ♦

The Hungry Eye prowls Kathmandu Valley in search of offbeat places to eat.

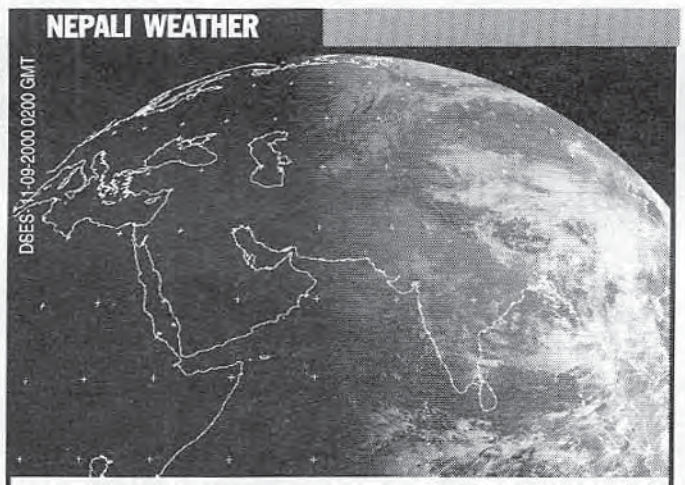
Ratings take into account food quality, taste, hygiene levels and service and come in the following categories:

👁	Not recommended
👁👁	Recommended
👁👁👁	Highly recommended

Price ratings are approximately:

$	Cheap
$$	Moderate
$$$	Expensive

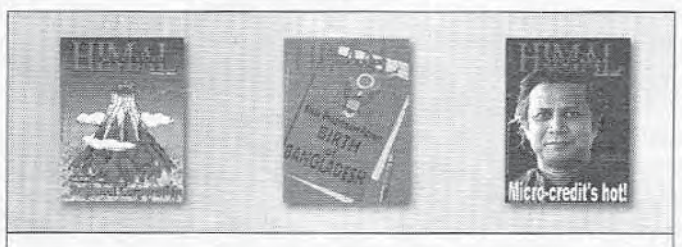
NEPALI WEATHER



With Dasain only two weeks away, you will be glad to know that the rains are now dying down. There are a few more straggler clouds above Bhutan that don't seem know which way they are headed. A large low pressure area over the Bay of Bengal that was threatening us next week has been sucked away by a circulation over Vietnam and the South China Sea. Mild westerlies are beginning to assert themselves, and these will gradually blow away any moisture-laden clouds that come up to Nepal. Expect nippier weather, some light mist in mornings after night rain and more golden sunshine.

KATHMANDU

Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
27-18	29-19	29-19	28-18	29-18



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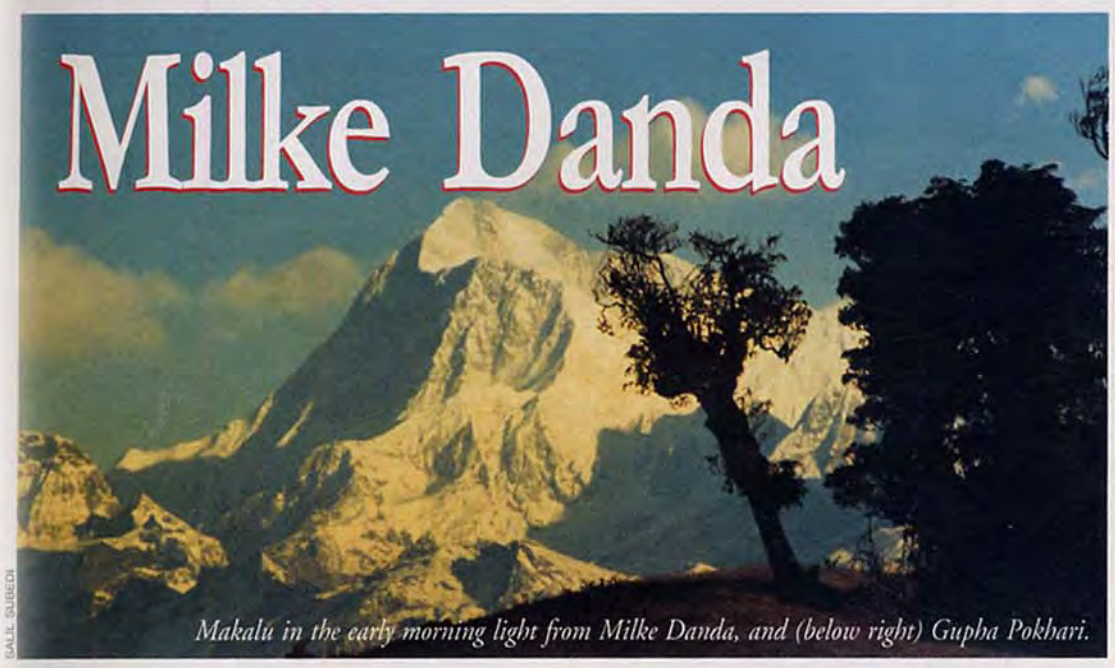
NEPALI SOCIETY

by SALIL SUBEDI

Milke Danda



SALIL SUBEDI

Makalu in the early morning light from Milke Danda, and (below right) Gupha Pokhari.

I know this is not the rhododendron season, but who says you have to visit Milke Danda only when Nepal's national flower is in bloom? If there is a rhododendron theme park in Nepal it is Milke Danda, a cloud forest in eastern Nepal over the Tamur Valley north of Dhankuta.

Milke Danda is a biodiversity treasure house with 16 types of rhododendron, 420 species of birds, thousands of species of butterflies and a wealth of plant life. Situated in an area that receives more than 3,500mm rainfall annually, the forest here is richer and wilder than in any other part of Nepal. During the monsoon months, it is perpetually in mist and the cloud forest turns into a leech forest. By late September when the clouds begin to part, the panoramic view that pans the Himalaya from Kanchendzonga to Everest is astounding. The sky is a deep shade of blue that you can see only in the post-monsoon season.

Unsettled and completely off the main trekking maps, Milke Danda is ideally suited for trekkers who like to be off-beat. The Milke ridge originates in the Jaljale Himal area and plunges due south towards the tarai. It has an average altitude of 3,000m. The epicentre of Milke Danda is Gupha Pokhari (2,800m), which reflects the massive white wall of the south face of Chamlang and Makalu in its waters on a clear day.

No remote area remains remote for long, and even here lodges have sprung up catering to the few trekkers who happen to come by. The Sherpas here are from Num, not from Khumbu, and a favourite item they sell is *chhurpi*, the rock hard cheese that you let dissolve in your month.

Caravans of *dzo* carrying supplies up to Gupha Pokhari and further north to Taplejung are encountered frequently on the trail. The yaks carry large bronze- and copperware down the valley and take stacks of noodles, biscuits and snacks back up to Taplejung. There are plenty of basic lodges where you can spend the night, and in some of them the very Nepali custom of free lodging if you pay for food is still practised. (This system has been steadily eroded along the main trekking trails in Nepal.)

It was Frenchman Rene de Mille Ville who made Milke Danda known to the outside world with his fascinating account of the flowers in full bloom in March-April. The forest cover, which had started depleting due to indiscriminate felling, is coming back due to conservation efforts by community groups. Villagers have realised that there is more money to made from the tourism attracted by the rhododendron than by cutting down the trees.

To get to Milke Danda, you start walking from the roadhead at Basantapur (2000m), four hours' bus ride north of Dhankuta. It takes three days' steady climb to reach the spine of Milke Danda. Another way to get here is to fly to Taplejung from Biratnagar, but even from there it is a four-day walk south. My preferred option is to fly to Tumlingtar from Kathmandu or Biratnagar (private airlines do this route, so there are more chances of getting a seat).

From Tumlingtar to Milke Danda via Chainpur takes three days. You can get into Chainpur after a pleasant walk through forests. Chainpur is a Newari trading town with inclined cobblestone streets and shops selling bronzeware. The weekly market draws farmers and goods from far and wide.Nundhaki, a Rai village, is next.

On reaching Gupha Pokhari the next day, there are two options. Either walk east another two days to Taplejung and take a flight back to Kathmandu, or descend to Basantapur in one and a half days via Lam Pokhari and Tinjure Phedi and take a nine-hour bus ride to Biratnagar and fly back. ♦

SALIL SUBEDI

HAPPENINGS

SALIL SUBEDI

Peter Stewart, race director of the Himalayan Mountain Bike Championship Race Series 2000 assisting his five-year-old son Sanjay to begin the race. The second race is scheduled for 1 October.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

SummIT 2000, billed as "the world's premier IT and communication event" and attended by South Asian information technology participants, opened at the Soaltee Crown Plaza on 9 September.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Fashion show entitled "Essence of Women" opened 9 September at Hotel Radisson, organised by Designer Clothline. At the ramp (l to r), models Ambika, Shoba, Chumta, Kiran, Kala, and Monika. Dipesh Bhattarai in middle.

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Funny Side Up

by Kunda Dixit

Q&A

After that scintillating Q&A with Riz Khan, we hear that the prime minister has decided to appear regularly on CNN to answer questions from eager viewers.

Riz Khan: Welcome back to the programme, prime minister. So how has the Millennium Summit been for you?

Girija: My dear friend, I come from a land of summits, so for me there is nothing so special about this Summit. In fact, I had a summit with Kishunji just before I left and we decided that we would not come to blows just yet, and we would wait till the Party Convention.

Riz: But have you been meeting any world leaders in the corridors?

Girija: Not exactly in the corridors, but I did run into Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayeeji and General Musharrafsahab in the men's room and had a very small mini-summit right there. I had to remind them that there is a proverb in Hindi "*pyar kiya to darna kya*?" (which roughly translated means "my nuke is bigger than your nuke"). So I told them, look here my dear enemies, Nepal may be small country but our soldiers fight in one of your armies, so both of you have to be very careful.

Riz: We have a question here from Raju in Guam via email. He says: "I want to know when Nepal will become a rich country so I can come back home."

Girija: Raju bhai, this is a difficult question. As you know Nepal is a mountainous country sandwiched like a yam between two stones, India and China. We have a total area of 56,000 square miles. Our national flower is rhododendron, national bird is danphe, and our national pastime is pulling each other's legs. We don't take ourselves seriously, that is why we like to pull legs. Therefore we can never go ahead. So if I were you, I'd keep that casino job and send home your dollar earnings so that we can afford to send 22 officials, one coach and five athletes to the Olympics every four years.

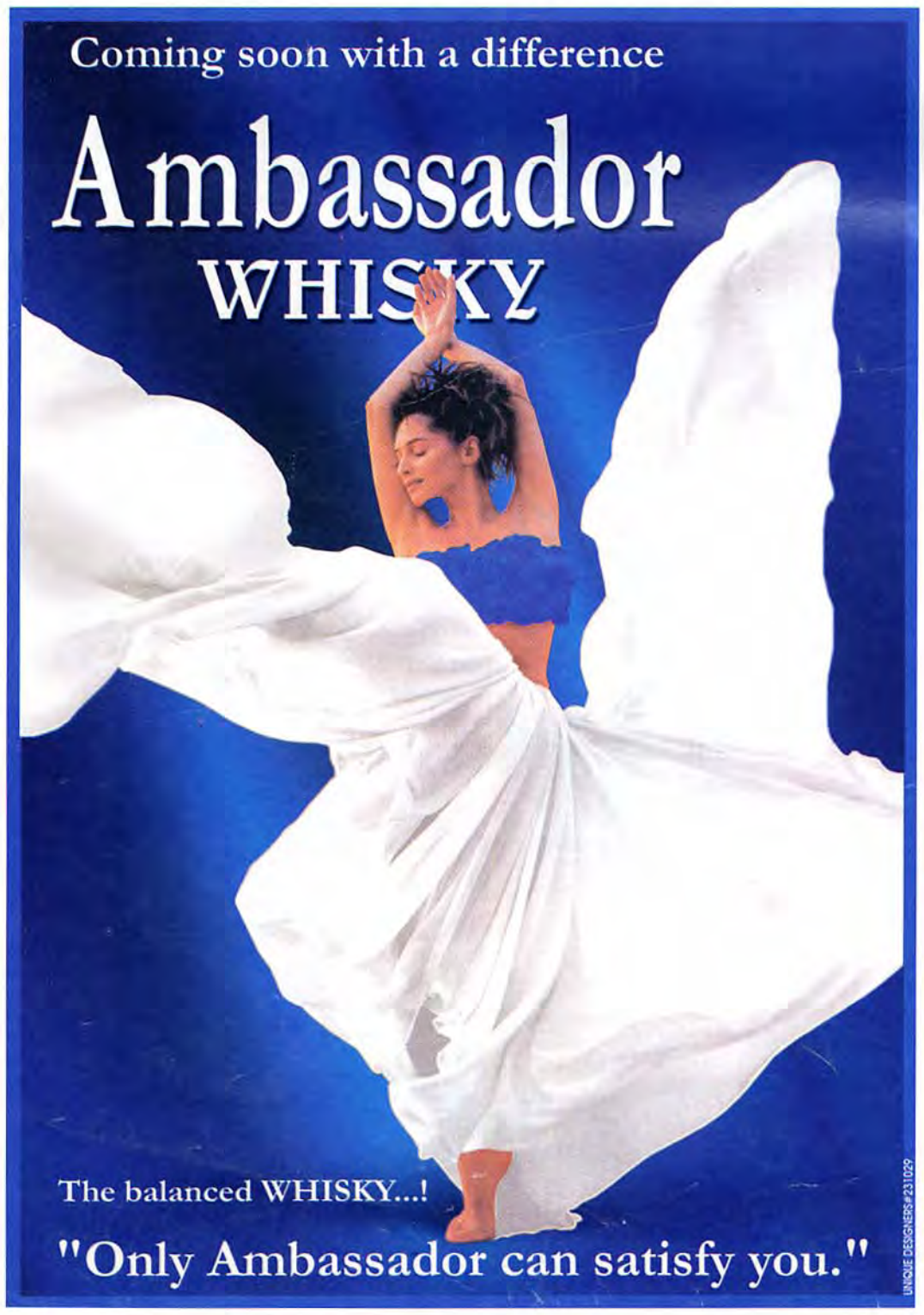
Riz: We have time for one last question, and on the line from Rolpa is a Mr Prachanda. Go ahead. "I'm sorry to use the CNN channel, but I can't get through to the prime minister in Baluwatar. Girijababu, are you going to send Sher Bahadur to talk to us, or not?"

Girija: My dear comrade, as you must be knowing, we have planned a three-pronged approach to deal with you. We are giving our police better TA/DA so they will be less reluctant to come and pay you a visit at your headquarters, we are bribing your cadre to defect to us, and lastly but not leastly we are keeping Deubaji dangling there with you so he won't bother us.

Prachanda: So why don't you come to Rolpa yourself? We could have a Summit.

Girija: That's very kind of you. We have an all-party integrated package programme designed for your district. But I am hopeful that I can make it after Dasain. Shall I bring a *khasi*?

Riz: We've run right out of time, and I'm afraid we'll have to leave it there. Thank you, prime minister, thank you, comrades. ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Sabine Lehman played the role of Senior Queen in the Studio 7 production of Diamond Sumshere's The White Tiger.

Seamless Sabine

Sabine Lehman has built boats and sailed the oceans in them. She is a lapsed revolutionary, a theatre personality, a business executive, and has turned vegetarian recently. When Sabine left Berlin in the early 1970s as a graduate in performing arts, she had no idea that someday she would be living her life as a theatre actor and hotel executive in the Himalaya. But what is life, if not full of surprises?

Today, Sabine is the chief custodian of Kathmandu Valley's theatre circuit, with annual productions from her Studio 7 dealing with everything from Shakespearean classics to translated adaptations of Nepali historical novels. Over the years, Studio 7 has come to be known in Kathmandu for 20 or more brilliant shows with exquisite props, intriguing scripts, musical discoveries and a wealth of local talent.

Her most recent plays have been the English translation of *The White Tiger* by Diamond Sumshere Rana (1998), *The Life of Milerepa* (1999), and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* (2000). *The White Tiger* got rave reviews, and brought alive to contemporary Kathmandu audiences the palace intrigues that accompanied the rise of Jang Bahadur Rana—events that have had a profound impact on who rules Nepal till now.

Sabine manages to seamlessly combine her acting hobby with the business chores of being Managing Director of Hotel Vajra. So how did a sailing enthusiast end up here in a landlocked Himalayan kingdom? The answer could be a Studio 7 production: Sabine was shipwrecked while in a boat she herself built while on a cruise from Australia to Surabaya in Indonesia. She ended up doing stage performances with her group, Theatre of All Possibilities, in Kerala. Then she happened to fly up to Kathmandu for an international mountain conference in 1978. Sabine immediately decided this was the place for her: "I decided to leave the ocean and go up to the mountains."

Drama is escapism, and Sabine says it is a way for people to make believe and get away from the tired routines of everyday life. "Whether they are comic, tragic or romantic, dramas recreate moments of death and birth. It is a chance to step out of it for a moment and it does not matter whether that moment lasts for a second, a minute or an hour. It's what you felt then."

The stage is an arena for Sabine to ask a fundamentally existential question: "What is this great drama we are all in?" ♦

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	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	53.85
Bhutan	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
India	0.66	0.37	0.58	0.29	0.14	0.05	45.65
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
Pakistan	0.44	0.46	0.55	0.24	0.13	0.04	54.70
Sri Lanka	0.77	0.38	0.64	0.25	0.20	0.03	78.32
Nepal	0.66	0.39	0.55	0.33	0.18	0.08	72.55

All prices are are in US dollars, collected from informal sources, and are only indicative.