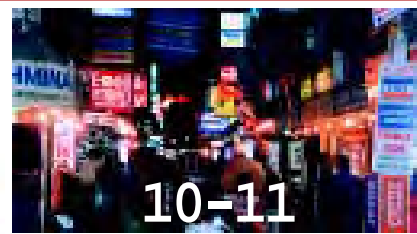


THAMEL



FREAK STREET

12

NEPAL'S FRENCH CONNECTION

17

EXCLUSIVE

Ides of March

Another peak tourist season. Another threat of a hotel strike. Hotel unions and owners are on warpath again as talks failed. Unions will go on strike 14 March unless owners meet the demand for a 10 percent service charge. Bishnu Rimal, general secretary of one union, GEFONT, says there is no hope of compromise. The only thing unions and hotels agree about is that government mediation is a failure. The deputy prime minister tried to get the tourism minister to act, and he did not. The prime minister's office entered the fray and asked Foreign Minister Chakra Bastola to step in. But Bastola was out conferencing in Burma, he is now in China with the king, and then perhaps he's off to Paris with the PM. So, who's going to save the tourism industry?

Prachanda's shining path

Six years into its "People's War," the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) seems to be moving towards a mediated settlement. A 25 February statement signed by Chairman Prachanda (hitherto, the general secretary) advocates a combination of an "armed mass revolt" and the People's War. By straightforward deduction, we can now expect the Maoists to become more active in everything from *bandhs* to *chakka-jams* even as they continue to "consolidate" their positions in the hinterland.

The "progressive shift" in the modus operandi is more realistic, says Shyam Shrestha, editor of the monthly magazine *Mulyankan* and a former member of the Unity Centre (part of which broke off to become the CPN-Maoist). "If you look at Nepal's political history you'll find that all struggles that started in the periphery have fizzled out. Only upheavals in urban centres, especially Kathmandu, have brought any political change."

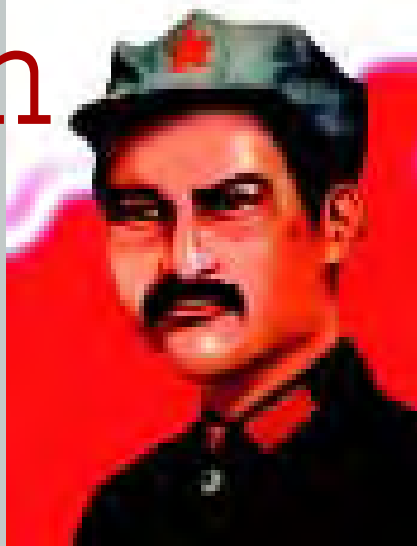
The Maoist statement follows a recent conference at an undisclosed location in which it was decided that:

- Revolutionary models from elsewhere won't work in Nepal, hence the incorporation of 'Prachanda Path' with Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.
- A conference of political parties (including the Congress), and related organisations and associations should be held to decide on an interim government which will frame a 'people's constitution'.
- A 'Great Leap Forward' will push for the expansion of secure bases, strengthening of people's local governments and efforts toward the formation of a people's central government.
- A broad-based 'united front' should be formed to work toward forming a central-level people's government, to be backed by a 'mass line' that will mobilise the masses.

Reading between the lines, Hari Rokka, an independent communist activist, says, "They were demanding a constituent assembly and now are talking of an interim government. Maybe they're moving towards a political solution. They've made a political proposal and I think talks are possible. The Maoists now have to avoid changing positions every time there is talk of talks, and the government must respond constructively."

The statement also gives indications that the Maoists have had to accommodate more people in leadership positions. The party constitution has been amended to form a three-tiered leadership: a central committee, a politburo and a standing committee. Following the Chinese model, it means a third of the central committee makes up the politburo, out of which a close-knit standing committee is named.

However, we get to know nothing about where the other well-known Maoist leader, Baburam Bhattarai, stands in the party hierarchy. He is mentioned twice—as having made the opening and closing statements at the party meet. In that sense, the restructuring could as well reflect a power struggle within and the new chairman's efforts to find a tactical power balance. ♦



SUBHAS RAI

BUSINESS NOT AS USUAL

Indo-Nepal trade has soared and both countries have benefited. But some Indian businesses are not happy, and they are getting New Delhi to turn the screws.

BINOD BHATTARAI

It is a win-win situation for India and Nepal: this huge growth in bilateral trade after the 1996 treaty. In four years, Nepal's exports to India have grown a whopping seven-fold. India's exports to Nepal have trebled. So what's the problem? Why are the Indian government and business leaning on Nepal to change the rules, even re-negotiate the 1996 treaty that made all this possible?

Answer: some business lobbies along Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have been affected by Nepal's cheaper (and often better-quality) exports. They have convinced the powers that be in New Delhi that these exports have "surged" because Nepal is re-exporting third country goods to India. The lobbies have launched a media campaign vilifying Nepali business, accusing it of everything from being a hotbed of Pakistani intelligence to a conduit for smuggled Chinese goods.

A group of Nepali businessmen who visited New Delhi in mid-February got a stiff warning from Indian *babudoms*: do something about value-addition, or else. "They were very tough," recalls Prabhakar SJB Rana, co-chairman of the Indo-Nepal Joint Economic Committee which is made up of the

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI). The JEC met on 13 February. Rana thinks the pressure was exerted not because the CII wanted to but because the government was taking a harder line on the CII.

In New Delhi, FNCCI agreed to look at the entire list of goods being exported from Nepal and examine the value-addition. Effectively there are less than ten main export items from Nepal to India: toothpaste, soap, *ghru*, polyester yarn and jute goods, to name a few. But FNCCI is said to have made it clear it would be able to do little about the smuggling and security concerns that seem to be rattling the Indians.

Both Nepali and Indian businessmen agree that value-addition is a good concept, since it means more employment and genuine industrialisation. CII's Aloke Mookherjee told us during a recent visit to Kathmandu: "Manufacturing should not just merely be cutting, polishing, finishing or screw driving. The value addition norm should provide some benefits to the country and its people."

Although the CII has shown considerable understanding of the Nepali position, that does not seem to be the case

with other trade groups, including the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) which represents the petty traders and industrial groups and which has taken its lobbying and media campaign into high gear to pressure Nepal.

The dilemma for Nepali business is: do we stick to our guns and risk losing the gains of the past five years, or compromise pragmatically and get what we really want—which is more Indian investment that will bring jobs, royalty and export revenue. There are indications that there may be a few symbolic gestures on value addition and "surge" control in the run-up to the automatic renewal of the 1996 treaty later this year.

A meeting of Indian and Nepali government officials slated for mid-February was postponed till end-March at India's request. There are indications the Indians will insist on changing the trading rules as a pre-condition to renewal. Nepali business sources tell us that specific rules for value addition—lower than the World Trade Organisation requirements—and stricter enforcement of the definition of manufacturing may be introduced by year-end, if only to keep India happy.

Continued on p8



SUBHAS RAI



PRACHANDANISTAS

Just as cherry blossoms erupt on the scattered, scraggly trees on the dusty Ring Road, comes Comrade Prachanda's declaration of a 'Path' named after himself. Chairman Mao has been replaced by Chairman Prachanda, till now only general secretary. If that be the case, then surely Maoism has been replaced by Prachandanism, and the Maoists are henceforth to be called Prachandanistas. The analysts are still not geared up to tell us what the four-page press release tells us about the future of Nepal – was it a peace offering or an indication of a further tightening of the noose on the body politic?

While the Maoists were having their big conference, Kathmandu also saw a spurt in "interaction" programmes discussing the insurgency. The fact that it has taken five years and 1,600 lives for the Nepali intelligentsia to register this conflict is telling in itself. But better late than never. Just one word of warning: let's not have a foreign-funded peace industry here, as have sprouted in some other conflict areas in the name of civil society. Let us do what needs to be done ourselves on confidence-building measures, concrete dialogue and human rights monitoring, which will become increasingly important in the days to come. This is our problem, we need to solve it ourselves.

As a correspondent wrote in this paper last week, the Maoists have in five short years forced the nation to take notice of them and the societal contradictions, justice and equity issues that they purport to fight for. All right, they have made their point. Many who sympathise with the Maoists' demands do not agree with their rationale for violence. The end is agreeable, but not the means.

A neglected topic of discussion in all the *gosthis* and *antarkriyas* of the capital is how the insurgency has forced development to the back-burner, which is ironic since it is neglect and lack of development that feeds the fires of discontent in the first place. The result: development work everywhere is grinding to a halt. Some projects were dependency-deepening, donor-driven and wasteful, and needed rethinking anyway. But many genuine grassroots initiatives were starting to give the local people hope, through the actions of accountable and visionary elected local officials. There has been a genuine move towards local self-government, and this was going to be one of the finest payoffs of our nearly dozen years of democracy.

It is a tragic waste, then, that the Maoist insurgency has now begun to impact on development in just the areas we were beginning to have some success. However much the Maoists have said they do not want to target honest and effective anti-poverty strategies at the grassroots, the word doesn't seem to have got down to their local cells. And this is why we are seeing a gathering sense of doom at the grassroots. Maoists have already effectively uprooted local governments in over a hundred VDCs, which is like removing the brick on which the foundation of decentralised governance rests.

If there is one area in this conflict on which everyone agrees it is that there can be no military solution. Even the Maoists, for whatever reason, have left the door open for negotiations, and their pre-conditions for talks seem reasonable. The demand in the Prachanda Path for an interim government as a first step towards a 'people's constitution' can be construed as a moderation of their previous stance. It could be posturing, but that they even mention talks is an indication that they are responding to public opinion against violence. The government's unstated position is that it needs to step up the military pressure to bring the Maoists to the table, hence the Armed Police Force. But so far, the talk about talks is just that: talk.

The conflict has not yet erupted into full-scale war. Negotiations have the best chance of success before the big guns start blazing, and the 'three-nought-threes' are replaced by Kalashnikovs. After that, the momentum of war takes over and it may take decades to pick up the pieces. The roots of the problem lie in



with this one. Those who call themselves patriots seem not to realise that a protracted conflict is a lose-lose situation for all sides, and ultimately will be a threat to our sovereignty.

Well, if the above-ground politicians will not help us find an answer, perhaps the underground Prachandanistas will. Let us hope, perhaps against hope, that the Prachanda Path—and its emphasis that Nepal's revolution will have to have its own characteristics since none of the past 'proletarian revolutions' can serve as a model and its addition of 'mass armed revolt' to the 'people's war'—indicates a move by the insurgents to move towards mainstream, and aboveground politics. For the sake of genuine decentralisation alone, and the sake of the people at large, this should happen.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Corruption, Nepalis and the Expat

What do we do, eradicate politicians with diplomatic pesticide?

When President George W Bush feels comfortable enough to bomb Iraq on a whim, it would be unreasonable to expect his envoy to a poor country to practice diplomatic niceties. His Excellency Ralph Frank wasn't just being frank when he alluded to the dreaded C-word. He was the swashbuckling American cowboy itching to take on the Injuns. We are expected to be impressed and applaud the ambassador for his courage in calling a spade a spade, and some heavyweight journalists dutifully obliged. Waxing eloquent about powerful envoys probably has its advantages.

These days, it's fashionable to berate Corruption at the first opportunity. Often, corruption is portrayed as the root of all evil—it is almost as if all our woes would disappear if we could only get rid of this menace. Columnists full of righteous ire but little understanding of social dynamics urge us to eradicate it, thinking it is as easy as doing away with the small pox virus or carriers of malaria. Politicians, not unnaturally, are portrayed as the prime carriers of the corruption pathogen. So what do we do, eradicate politicians with diplomatic pesticide?

The argument that democracy has given a fillip to kickbacks is inherently implausible. Graft is as old as human society, but we hear about Lauda Airs more often today simply because such obscenities have become more transparent, and lewd talk about corruption more possible. Certainly, Nepal has no monopoly over this, the true oldest profession, in a world where there are Bofors and the Qattarocchis, and Bill Clintons leaving White Houses providing clemency to certain 'Rich' people.

Let us be clear about this. The tycoons of today haven't become what they are by dint of hard work alone. The tainted money of a wealthy first generation becomes "safe money" by the second, matures into a "family fortune" by the third, and ends up being squeaky-clean "old money" by the fourth. Going back to the American landscape, it was after all the robber barons or their scions who endowed today's philanthropic foundations that are at the forefront of raising consciousness on issues of social and economic justice.

Capitalism is based on avarice, and corruption is an inalienable component of it. As is often said, the only way of getting rid of corruption is by making it legal. Look at where fear of corruption has put our tourism industry, where the national airline cannot even lease, much less buy, a single

aircraft in a world awash with ready-to-go wide bodies. Surely kickbacks played a part in supplying Royal Nepal Airlines in the late Panchayat era with the two aircraft which have been the mainstay of its international fleet, the American-made Boeing 757s.

Deriding corruption has become popular simply because it distracts us from real hard issues—inequality, exploitation, and the dedication of the power elite to continue with the status quo. Among the donors, the focus on corruption is popular because it shifts the onus completely on Nepali shoulders and the uncomfortable question, "So what were you doing since the 1950s (when USAID joined us in our development crusade)?" need not be asked or answered.

"Old corruption is all right, let's stop the rotation," goes the argument. Hypothetically, let us assume that corruption is eradicated. How will that alter the fact that in 1998, the top 20 percent of the world's population consumed 86 percent of goods and services, while the bottom 20 percent (including us) had to make do with only about 1.3 percent? His Excellency Ralph Frank must be aware that the assets of his three wealthiest countrymen are more than the combined GNP of all the Least Developed Countries and their 600 million people put together. No wonder Gayatri Spivak reads "globalised" as "Englished", and the "national interest" of United States as the masquerade of globalisation.

The paternalistic power elite love the order of binary opposites. Dichotomies like good/bad, right/wrong, order/anarchy provide them with an opportunity to display their power, and determine what is desirable and worthwhile. As the sole dominating power of the unipolar world, the US takes its role as the global policeman with *dead* seriousness. And of what use is police power when there are no culprits to whip around?

The World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. If that definition is applied, all our rulers prior to the overthrow of the Ranas were irredeemably corrupt. But just like the inequality explanation, this historical-cultural apology doesn't lead us anywhere either. What we need to concentrate on instead is building a system of checks and balances in order to control corruption at the policy level. The rot has to be stemmed at the top, because it's from there that the poison seeps down.

Ironically, it's people at the top who shout the loudest about corruption. It's easy to sneer when you sit pretty in the safety of an upper-class cocoon.

One feasible way to go about tackling Corruption could be by making people in power declare not only their assets, but also their sources of income. The taxmen can take over from there, who, in turn, can be watched over by constitutional authorities, who are scrutinised by the public via the prying eyes of the media. It's not a foolproof method—there are none—but it is a good way to begin. You will be surprised by the number of people who live regally without any known sources of income, and never feel the need to pay a paisa to the exchequer.

That said, there is no need to be too pessimistic. Unlike the trends elsewhere, corruption has come home to roost in Nepal, and this not as bad a thing as you might think. Prior to the People's Movement, corruption had wings, and the booty flew to safe havens abroad. These days, corruption moves around visibly on wheels. Sumptuous palaces are built, but on Nepali soil. Kickbacks which stay in the country constitute a form of capital accumulation, and there is no one doubting that since the demise of the Panchayat corrupt commoners have played their part in the distribution of ill-gotten income.

It is difficult to guess the amount that got stashed away in Swiss banks during the opaque Panchayat days, but Ranas habitually decamped to India with their loot. Padma in Ranchi, Khadga in Sagar, Dev in Musoorie, Mohan in Bangalore—Indian cities are full of Ranas who "inherited" the blood and sweat of Nepali peasants, and went away with it to live a life of luxury.

Foreign consultants and experts living off the aid that comes into the country in the form of loans for poor Nepalis do something similar, particularly those individuals (you know who you are) who have little to give but get extensions year after year on the indulgence of aid agency hakims. Foreign consultants and experts, by and large, take away what should have been ours. ♦



VIEWPOINTS

A dangerous place



Admiral Ramdas, chief of the Indian Navy (1990-93), and now turned “peacenik”.

he shared history, common heritage, historical experience, compulsions of geography make South Asia one. Our destinies are intertwined by history and geography. And in the middle of it all we have India, the land where the Buddha found enlightenment, the land of Ashoka and Gandhi. A country that maintained that it would never go into nuclear weapons, but it broke the code.

Pakistan and India have influenced the course of events in South Asia. This continued state of animosity portends grave danger, which is heightened by the process of nuclearisation. This tension has hijacked the destiny of our region. Smaller South Asians have tried to distance themselves from the nuclear issue saying “it doesn’t really concern us, it is happening on the other side.” But nuclear weapons have a politics of their own, and an overarching influence on all matters concerning politics, economics and development. The price you pay for nuclearisation is quite dramatic not only in financial but also human terms. The hope that after the Cold War nuclear weapons would not be needed has been regrettably debunked. The power and status that nuclear weapons were supposed to give you are false, but this doctrine is interpreted currently as: well, India has the bomb so it can be a member of the Security Council. But if that is the only currency required to be a member of the Security Council, then why not Pakistan, why not anyone else?

Many argue that nuclear weapons are a great political status symbol and have deterrence value. But nuclear weapons are politically counter-productive, economically disastrous, militarily totally inefficient, and ethically and morally indefensible. Indian and Pakistani activists have now formed peace and nuclear disarmament movements—at a meeting in Delhi last year, there were delegates from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. Over 450 million people in India live below the poverty line, it is similar in other parts of South Asia. Poverty is the real issue here, that is the common enemy.

South Asians are South Asians no matter where they come from, and it is important to express that as forcefully as we can. Our future is going to be determined by what we the people say, and not those people who think they know all about what we need, and do not need. Unfortunately, on nuclear weapons, India has been an errant member. Pakistan, which does everything India does, has followed suit, and I’m glad no one else has.

To deal with this culture of solving problems through violence, we need a new kind of education, from elementary school up so we can spread the message of tolerance and encourage a culture of peace as opposed to a culture of violence. This whole region can be a nuclear-free zone. India and Pakistan already have the weapons so they may not want to join this initially, but the remaining countries of South Asia have a right to demand that they live in a nuclear-free zone. Collectively we can make quite an impact and reach out to politicians who at present are only listening to scientists in the nuclear weapons field and get carried away by their machismo. We owe the future generations a peaceful and safe environment. ♦

An Indo-Pakistan nuclear exchange is not a matter just for those two squabbling neighbours, it will affect us too. Nepal will be directly downwind from the fallout. A retired admiral of the Indian Navy and a Pakistani academic spoke in Kathmandu recently, urging activism for a nuclear-free South Asia.



Zia Mian, professor of energy and environmental sciences at Princeton University, and anti-nuke activist.

I am a doom-monger. We now believe that in May 1998 India probably tested at least one real nuclear weapon that they can actually use in war, the other four were much more experimental. The hydrogen bomb that they tested may not have worked anywhere near as well as they claimed. Pakistan also claimed to have tested six devices (to match India’s five plus one in 1974—that is the level of infantile sensibilities that are at work on this issue). Pakistan tested at least one nuclear weapon optimised for use in war.

The size of the weapons tested appear to be in the Hiroshima category—10-15 kilotons. There is no great scientific breakthrough, this is 60-year-old engineering, although politicians and the media in both countries have lauded it as the greatest technological breakthrough in their countries. Both countries also tested missiles and claim they can field ballistic missiles with ranges in excess of 2,000 km.

There is no sign that the arms race between India and Pakistan is abating. There was a recent Agni missile test by India, there is pressure from the nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles complex to carry out more tests to refine warheads and delivery vehicles. Indian and Pakistani facilities that make fissile material and weapons are running three shifts a day, seven days a week to maximise the number of weapons that they can make. India, Pakistan and Israel are the only countries which are continuing to produce enriched uranium and plutonium for weapon use.

The big question we now face is how soon and in what ways these weapons will be deployed, and the structures of command and control, and how that authority will be maintained given the other failures of technology and institution we suffer from. A detailed study of a single nuclear blast over Mumbai has shown that a 15 kiloton explosion would kill 800,000 people immediately—people burned and blasted to death or given fatal doses of radiation immediately. There will be many thousands more who will die of their wounds over the next weeks and months. The simple fact of population density makes similar death tolls certain in any other major Indian or Pakistani city. There is no way you can change that, no way you can talk about nuclear shelter, evacuating tens of millions of people in the 15-30 minutes it usually takes from launch to impact. We have calculated and simulated a small nuclear war in South Asia. We assumed that instead of just one bomb in one city, that there is retaliation and counter retaliation. We looked at a case where five Indian cities and five Pakistani cities are attacked, each with only one weapon—this is a very conservative assumption. Senior Indian generals are on record as saying that India should be aiming to use at least three nuclear weapons against every target. And we are not even using a hydrogen bomb scenario. There will be some 2.9 million immediate deaths, and about 1.5 million severely injured people who would die later. With ballistic missiles there is no place in South Asia that would be outside the target list. And there is no such thing as a military target, anywhere you put a nuclear base you are going to be close to a large population in South Asia.

Nuclear weapons by virtue of their inherent properties are dangerous even if countries do not decide to go to war with them. Hundreds of nuclear weapons accidents have happened in the past with US and Soviet weapons on bombers, missiles on submarines where all but one of the safety systems failed and it was only blind luck that they didn’t go off. Military accidents in India and Pakistan have been very common, and every single nuclear weapon we build adds to the risk.

South Asia is not just a dangerous place, but will continue to be a dangerous place unless we do something about it. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union did nothing to reduce the number or the deployment of nuclear weapons. So even a settlement of the Kashmir dispute would not necessarily lead to the end of the nuclearisation of the subcontinent. Kargil showed that nuclear weapons do not deter war. We tested weapons in 1998, we went to war in 1999—we have a clear case of two nuclear weapons armed states going to war. ♦



LETTERS

NEPALI SOCIAL SCIENCE

In his review of *Resunga: The Mountain of the Horned Sage* (#29), Sudhindra Sharma highlights various features of the book and writes, “Also unique is the fact that the geographical boundary of the area studied is not ecological such as a basin or a watershed but political, constituting as it does, the two districts of Gulmi and Arghakanchi.” I fail to understand in what sense he has used the term “unique”. If Sharma was referring to the history of western scholarship on Nepal, then perhaps the use of this term is partially justified although there have been previous studies that have focused on regions that once were political units. But if one considers Nepali writings, the use of the term is quite inaccurate. There are many works in Nepali that focus on political boundaries at the district or the zonal level. Apart from works written by Nepali historians, we might recall Krishna P Parajuli’s classic *Purva ek number* (a study of Kavre-palanchowk and Sindhupalchowk published 35 years ago), Ratnakar Devkota’s works on Jumla, Dharmaraj Thapa’s book on

Lamjung, Puma P Yatri’s writings on Seti Anchal, the Royal Nepal Academy sponsored 5-volume study of the Karnali, etc. One can also think of quite a few *anchalik* Nepali fiction and non-fiction writings focused on political units, the latter having increased significantly in the last ten years. The list can be made long but that is not my intention here.

It is not much of a surprise that the French team of researchers who worked on the project from which this book was born does not seem to be aware of this genre of Nepali studies. However one does expect a reference and comparison to it from a Nepali social scientist of Sharma’s standing, especially so when he goes

on to talk about the politics of representation and reminds anthropologists that they need to reflect on “how and under what circumstances they enter the social scene being studied.” While berating the authors for failing to engage with issues highlighted by debates in social sciences regarding this politics, Sharma should have also asked how the entire French project could have been formulated

without a reference to the Nepali body of knowledge. Without an analysis that brings to critical focus the context in which Western scholarship on Nepal continues to be formulated even in these post-Saidian times, reference to the French pantheon of gurus (Foucault, Bourdieu and company) can only be read as a desire to be counted by the signposts established by metropolitan centres of social science theorising. As Said pointed out, Orientalism was the empire citing itself. Shall our engagement with Western scholarship on Nepal be done in a way as if we learnt nothing from his famous book and subsequent encounters with anthropology?

Pratyoush Onta
Martin Chautari
Kathmandu

COST-BENEFIT

Your last issue (#31) left me bitterly disappointed. Having shelled out Rs 20, I went home to find that I was chiselled out of Rs 3. In addition to finding page eight and page 13 absolutely blank, I found that the last page had been merged with first. I follow a certain routine while reading my favourite newspaper. I begin with Binod Bhattarai’s scintillating insights into all kinds of issues, notably the Maoists, and

reserve *Under my hat* for the very last, as a special treat. My routine was disrupted last week. If this kind of thing goes on much longer I am likely to turn to Maoism.

P.S. On second thoughts, my net loss is less than Rs 3. Some pretty nifty cost-benefit tells me that the blank page 8 saved me from having to read Artha Beed’s weekly bilge. I’ll cut my loss down to Rs 1.50. Maybe I won’t join the Maoists after all.

Ron Henderson
via email

HATS & HUNGRY EYE

I thought that *Under my hat* was a regular section that I could always find on the last page. This was not so in your last issue (#31)—must you switch the positions of regular columns? Anyway, it was a great piece, but do you have only people familiar with American sport buying this paper, or do you find that most Nepali people understand what a quarterback is and what a touchdown is? These terms are from American football and, I suspect, over 99 percent of Nepalis are not familiar with them.

And I was really disappointed by *The Hungry Eye* (#31). I think I have been to that place more than once and none of the so-called

“attentive waiters in green and brown jackets” were polite as the writer claims they are. Is the service fast? I don’t think so. It makes me wonder what these restaurants do to get such positive coverage. Fair enough, the “price range” has been assigned a notation, but why did the writer choose the dollar sign? There are other notations the writer could have used, and I read it as another instance of the Americanisation of Nepali Times.

NT is a great paper, but after I read *The Hungry Eye*, I don’t think I’ll be looking to you for restaurant recommendations.

BK Aryal
via email

Your page one article about “knockout tournaments” is disgraceful (“All Nepal Knockout Tournament”, #31). Ask yourself what you actually accomplish



intellectually and from the standpoint of responsible journalism. By poking fun at elected representatives, you do not further the cause of educating readers or moulding public opinion in a constructive manner. You demonstrate immaturity and scepticism, not qualities that will help make a positive impact on your readership.

Bhaskar
via email

Kunda Dixit’s column displays satire almost equal to Jonathan Swift.

Rosalia Scalia
via email

For a moment, I thought Kunda Dixit had overlooked the all-important stipulation against claiming injuries to brains by our latter-day gladiators at the National Legislature. But then, I realized that he also does not mention stipulations against claiming injuries to horns and hoofs.

Yasoda Iwaram “Prakriti”
Lazimpat

Correction

The articles on page 7, (Saving Nepal #31), were wrongly attributed to Puskar Bhusal. See Somewhere in Nepal II, p7. -Ed.

Sickness and health in Kathmandu



HEMLATA RAI & SALIL SUBEDI

Privately run medical services in Kathmandu have been commercialised to such an extent that falling sick is now an expensive affair. In the absence of medical insurance and a social security net, medical treatment is fast turning into a luxury.

Public hospitals on the other hand, often criticised for inefficiency and mismanagement, have become oases of hope, the only resort for poor and middle-class Nepalis when ill. They provide all sorts of basic and sophisticated treatment at a low cost, or even free in some cases. "It isn't sophisticated instruments or five-star luxury that cures people in hospitals. It is the devotion, skill and care of medical professionals that performs miracles," claims Bir Bahadur Khawas, Chief Executive Officer of Patan Hospital.

A hospital management veteran with 40 years of experience, Khawas has seen Nepal's medical sector grow with the introduction of advanced medical services and technology. Patan Hospital itself has seen people's expectations and medical needs change over the last few decades. Established by the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) in 1954 as a referral hospital that provided only general care, it was

turned into a full-fledged hospital in the early 1980s after being handed over to an independent board in November 1982 under an agreement between the government and the UMN. Patan Hospital provides heavily subsidised services—the actual cost of the delivery service for low-risk deliveries is Rs 3,000 at its Birthing Centre, and around 4,500 such babies are born here annually. Their mothers pay only Rs 1,000 or, if the hospital's Social Service Department recommends it, absolutely nothing. (The Department gathers detailed information from all patients admitted to the hospital regarding their financial situation. It then makes recommendations for a full or a partial fee waiver if the patient cannot afford to pay for the service, whether or not the patient has put in a request to be considered as a "charity case".) For those who can afford it, and for those who need it, Patan Hospital also has more expensive wards that provide specialised care.

The entry of significantly more expensive private medical institutions means more choices for those who can afford them, and have thus reduced some of the burden on public hospitals. But even subsidised hospitals want to cash in on the rising medical expenditure of the upwardly mobile segment of the urban population—Patan Hospital is establishing the Patan Private Clinic and a specialised paediatric ward by

the end of this year. Here, you can book a service or fix an appointment over the phone, for charges as high as those at private nursing homes. "The introduction of these expensive facilities are important to sustain the hospital's charity programmes in case donors pull out," says Khawas. In the last fiscal year, Patan Hospital provided subsidised services worth over Rs 7.2 million, in addition to the subsidised medicines received from individual and institutional donors, the UMN and through government grants.

The inexpensive services and lack of adequate medical facilities in rural areas have created a rush at subsidised hospitals like Patan Hospital. This means better health care for people who otherwise would not get it, but it is also a cause of discontent among patients and their families. Anil Shrestha from Paanchkhal has a nine-month-old son with pneumonia undergoing treatment at the Kanti Children's Hospital (KCH), and he believes he has cause for complaint. He cites a scarcity of trained medical professionals, and mismanagement. "There are not enough nurses—two nurses handle four cabins," he says. He also expresses concerns about the hospital's cleanliness, saying bed linen is sometimes not changed for a week at a stretch.

But overworked medical

professionals have their own complaints. The average bed occupancy for the children's hospital is 98.9 percent, and with the rapid growth in population fuelled by Kathmandu-bound migration, and complicated referral cases, the pressure on the hospital's resources is immense. Last year the hospital saw 83,933 outpatient, 20,221 inpatient and 29,371 emergency cases. KCH was established under Soviet patronage in 1963 with 50 beds, and its management was handed over to His Majesty's Government in 1968. The management transfer, followed by the transfer of Bir Hospital's paediatric department, saw Nepal's first children's hospital completely in place. Presently, the hospital has an overarching medical ward that includes oncology, cardiology, a neonatal intensive care unit (ICU) and paediatric ICU (PICU) services, a surgery ward including the burn and plastic surgery wards, an anaesthesia department and a nursing department where trainee and intern nurses are also put to work.

The hospital provides both free and paid services. Public health workers evaluate the economic situation of patients, and the poor are treated free and provided any advanced services they might need. There is a separate 'non-paying ward', which treats poor children but conditions there are pretty bad. "There are serious financial constraints. It is the dedication of the staff that keeps the hospital running," says Dr. Govinda Prasad Ojha, Director of the Kanti Children's Hospital. (Hospital sources even say that sometimes rich urbanites come significantly dressed down, and ask for a waiver.) The hospital's free supplies are supported by a trust, with funds coming in from the interest on deposits put in place by various trusts like the Nepal

Paediatric Society, the KCH Appeal Fund, the Hashimoto Trust Fund set up by former Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, and the Oncology Fund set up by Carmal Dersch.

The KCH has a world-class paediatric ICU, considered one of the best in developing countries, and the ward is staffed around the clock with doctors and nurses. But things might not stay that way for long—the equipment is deteriorating and the government grant is insufficient to meet the hospital's actual funding needs. The service costs charged are very low, appropriate for "10 years back," say management staff at the hospital. The KCH charges Rs 500 for 24 hours at the PICU, but their running costs are over twice that. "If the government fails to extend the kind of support we need, things might slacken," says Dr. Ojha.

His neighbour, Dr. Manohar Gupta, ex-director at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH), thinks that despite all their weaknesses, Kathmandu Valley's public hospitals offer the best of doctors, equipment and treatment, as compared with private nursing homes. "The diagnostic facilities have improved and public hospitals are motivated to improve their efficiency after the arrival of private nursing homes. But in any case treatment at private institutions is out of the reach of many because of the expensive [and privately-funded] medical equipment they have, and also because they are run more like businesses," he says.

A doctor at the emergency ward of the TUTH who did not wish to be named has another criticism to make of private hospitals—patients in critical condition at these places, he says, are finally sent off to government hospitals as the private clinics don't want any "black marks" on their record—which might harm their investment. This may not be true for all privately run nursing homes, but there are several cases that seem suspiciously like the result of such a mindset. Man Bahadur Gurung of Pokhara has had such an experience—his wife was referred to the Bir Hospital from a Kathmandu nursing home after she was treated there for a gynaecological complication for six months, to little improvement.

The Bir Hospital, established in July 1889 with 15 beds, is the true pioneer in the establishment of modern medical services in Nepal. Even now, the hospital prides itself on being the first—and to date the only—medical institution in Nepal where coronary artery bypass surgery, closed-heart surgery, haemodialysis, neurosurgery, microneurosurgery and laparoscopic cholecystectomy (surgical removal of the gall bladder by laparoscopy) facilities are available. The hospital offers the services of 10 speciality departments and 15 super-special units. Presently, the hospital has 90 percent bed occupancy, of which 320 (82 percent) are free and 70 (18 percent) are paying beds. With an annual average of 9000 admissions, the present bed count is far less than



HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

The usual suspects

I leant over to the bewildered pilot, on his third run from Pokhara, and gave him my best Humphrey Bogart. "Fly it again, Sam."

JOMSOM: To begin with, a slight paraphrase of the opening lines from *Casablanca*, my favourite movie of all time. "Here the fortunate ones might obtain a helicopter and scurry to Pokhara. And the unfortunate ones, they wait in Jomsom, and wait, and wait, and wait..."

For a few days this week, *Casablanca* came to the Thak Khola, thanks to inclement weather and cancelled flights. So we waited, and waited, and waited.... In these situations, one either goes spare or starts observing matters with a wry and slightly jaundiced eye. I chose the latter. Ensnared at the Hotel Xanadu in Jomsom's main bazaar, the foreigners chatted about the trekking, the prices, the porters and eventually talk turned to their favourite topic: their bowels. I remember these conversations well from my early days on the road so I kept silent when the nether regions came up.

Two young Americans from California were wondering just how a certain fellow known as "W" ever, ever made it past frat house beer parties to the White House. "It's so-o-o embarrassing," they groaned. "He's, he's, well, not very bright. And he's only been outside the US four times." I wondered aloud whether the undoubtedly more intelligent but distinctly robotic Albert Gore Junior might have done any better. Reaching back into my decades of vital experience in these matters, I reminded them that his wife—known by the unlikely moniker "Tipper"—made her name in Washington by



leading a campaign against one of the great evils of all time—nasty rock and roll songs. She fell afoul of a personal hero of mine in doing so, the late Frank Zappa, and she came out badly wanting.

Both my temporary friends from the American left coast were shaking their heads in dismay by this time. "We voted for (Ralph) Nader," they said, washing their hands of the main contenders. "And that's why Bush won," chimed in a nearby Brit who mysteriously knew more about the US elections than they did, "he split the vote". An argument ensued, so I left the hotel to check with the control tower for the umpteenth time, in need of another dose of false hope.

Outside, a group of French trekkers were standing around their rucksacks, making that unique Gallic noise of derision and frustration. It's a puff of air through pursed lips, but something else happens to it along the way to give it just the right tone of Parisian scorn. They were angry at the cancelled flights, railing at the weather and being mobbed by local characters trying to sell them seats on a helicopter that was rumoured to be arriving soon. I even heard one of them say "Oo la la". It's true. I swear it is.

Then into town swept a procession of what the Indians call "godmen", robed sadhus. But these were Americans, and they were

determined to get out of town, flights or no flights. With remarkable and almost divine efficiency, they booked all the available helicopters and started nobbling forlorn foreigners, trying to sell them seats at a profit. I asked them what they intended to do with the money and they smiled with serene certainty. "Ishwar jannaa," said the headman in Ohio-accented Hindi, his long wavy white hair and beard snapping in the brisk winds.

All of Jomsom had come to watch the fun. Not much happens in the capital of Lower Mustang. A Newar from Kathmandu, working with a private airline, put it to me this way. "We get up early, we check in the passengers, meet the aircraft and see it off. Then we play cards until it's time to start drinking."

Choppers started clattering in, provoking mini-riots on the runway. It turned out that only Nepalis were allowed on the cargo flights so these quickly filled up at Rs1,000 per seat. Smaller helicopters took foreigners out in waves, including our American sadhus. And eventually, I climbed aboard my own chartered biman and headed for home. I wish Ingrid Bergman had been there so I could tell her "the problems of two little people don't mean a hill of beans in this crazy world, you're getting on that plane". But she wasn't, so I settled for leaning over to the bewildered pilot, on his third run from Pokhara, and giving him my best Humphrey Bogart. "Fly it again, Sam." ♦





the 800 to 1000 beds the Bir Hospital needs to meet the actual demand. The hospital has been promised funds for expansion by the Indian government, but the grant has not been forthcoming for the last 12 years. The land needed for expansion has been acquired (behind the Sajha dispensary and to the north of the nursing campus) and the foundation stone was laid during the state visit of India's former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral. But the promised 200-bed trauma- and emergency care-centre has not materialised. Though the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has repeatedly assured the Bir Hospital's management that the promised funds will be released imminently, it hasn't happened. Apart from the approximately 1,200 out-patient visits daily, the Bir Hospital serves an average of two "mass casualty emergency cases" (victims of road accidents, landslides, fires, etc) a month due to its central location and popularity.

"Political interference in the management of the hospital is crippling its performance," says Dr. Ram Prasad Shrestha, Director of the Bir Hospital. He is the first director of the Bir Hospital to complete one full year in the hot seat after the

restoration of the multiparty system 1990. The hospital has had 10 directors over the last nine years.

Apart from interference in appointments to the post of hospital director, political and bureaucratic bigwigs also like to use their influence in the appointment and posting of doctors, and in the placement of interns. Most of them get appointments or admissions through phone calls, while civilians have to stand in never-ending queues and are referred to packed medical care units.

Despite the tremendous contributions of public hospitals in the Kathmandu Valley to public health, the government seems reluctant to provide them better facilities and vitally needed funds. The hospitals face an acute shortage of water. Bir Hospital, for example, consumes about 250,000 litres of water daily but is supplied with only 30 to 50,000 litres a day by the government. The situation is the same at other hospitals, too, forcing them to rely on untreated water supplied by private tankers. Patan Hospital and Prasuti Griha (the maternity hospital) rely entirely on their own shallow and deep tube-wells. Prasuti Griha has round the

clock supply from an 80,000-litre water tank. "We are in a position where we can supply 20,000 litres of water at any time to fire engines as well," says Saraswati Padhyaya, Director of the Prasuti Griha.

Although these hospitals provide services at subsidised rates, they are charged at normal commercial rates for utilities like drinking water, telephones and electricity, which means a large chunk of their annual budget goes towards paying for essentials. Bir Hospital pays Rs 900,000, and Patan Hospital pays Rs 700,000 towards their monthly electricity tariffs alone, and then they have to rely on stand-by generators for an uninterrupted supply of electricity. All these hospitals are well-prepared for emergencies and have had disaster management plans in force for years, but no governmental body has taken their lead and assisted them by formulating a national plan to link all hospitals in times of large-scale disasters.

Kathmandu Valley's public health services could be a model for other developing countries. But if things go along the way they seem to be now, they will simply be one more lost opportunity. ♦

Prasuti Griha

Prasuti Griha, the maternity hospital at Thapathali, has been in the news lately. The Paropakar Sanstha, which founded the hospital in August 1959, is demanding that the management of the maternity hospital be handed back to them, saying that conditions have deteriorated since the government took over in 1989.

Prasuti Griha has a reputation for providing excellent service. On an average, about 15,000 women deliver their babies here annually. (Princess Shruti had both her daughters there.) Almost a third of these are deliveries with complications. Prasuti Griha started with 40 beds, and now has 310 beds and an average of 140 patients, including about 12 requiring surgical procedures, visit the hospital every day. It has separate departments for obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, anaesthesiology, nursing and pathology, and 13 support service units. Seventy percent of the beds are free as are neo-natal intensive care and other ICU services. Comparable services cost about Rs 3,500 per day in most private nursing homes.

"I don't know how others were treated, but I faced no difficulties here," said Shanti KC who was returning home after giving birth to a baby girl, her second delivery at the Prasuti Griha. "You can feel a motherly aura about the whole place."

"So far we have been able to provide each of our patients with proper beds," says the hospital's director, Saraswati Padhyaya. Ninety percent of the hospital's 565 staff are women. Their only problem seems to be the Sunday holiday. "Sunday is a holiday, but not for us. The government does not compensate us for any overtime we might put in. We continue to provide services because it would be altogether unethical not to do so. You just can't leave patients alone because Sunday is a holiday," says Padhyaya.

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King seeks court's help

King Birendra has decided to seek the Supreme Court's advice on what he should do with a controversial bill that was approved by parliament in late July amidst an opposition walkout (NT #3). The king wants the apex court to decide if the Bill in question, approved 26 July last year, is a finance bill. His move comes after a series of meetings he held with leaders from various political parties.

The Nepal Citizenship Act (1963) Amendment (1999/00) was discussed first in the State Affairs Committee of parliament before the Lower House passed it and sent it to the Upper House. The Upper House returned the Bill without even discussing it due to opposition from the king's nominees and the Marxist-Leninist members (the Nepali Congress does not have a majority here). Since the speaker of the Lower Houser had ruled that it was a finance bill, Nepali Congress rammed it through again and sent it to the king for approval.

The Constitution requires the king to approve a finance bill when it is submitted to him. In other cases the monarch can return a bill to parliament if he believes it needs further discussion. This bill was likely to have been challenged in court, even if the king had approved it.

Opponents to the bill say it does not have adequate safeguards to prevent foreigners (read: Indians) from obtaining citizenship certificates. Supporters of the bill don't agree, saying that not just are there adequate safeguards but it even has tougher strictures for officials who become party to fraud and misrepresentation.

What makes the bill important is that it would pave the way for granting certificates to about 4 million citizens without proper papers. A majority of those without papers are people from tarai districts. All political parties want the four-decade-old issue resolved but at the same time don't want any single party to walk away with the credit. The new bill has a clause that would grant citizenship to people even if their fathers had not obtained papers as required by the Constitution of 1962.

White paper, red paper

The Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation has brought out a "White Paper" on the controversial jet-leasing deal that has paralysed the country for the past few weeks. The RNAC says the leasing was done in accordance with its financial administration regulations and also complied with the government's own financial rules. It says all 18 of the airline's decisions to lease aircraft in the past had been done through direct negotiations. The paper says RNAC decided to go for direct negotiations after failing to acquire aircraft even after repeated attempts at open bidding as instructed by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA).

The airline also says most of the decisions regarding leasing the aircraft were made before parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) issued its cease orders on the deal. The procurement contract was finalised on 27 September 2000, while PAC's notice reached the corporation only on 20 November, weeks after the RNAC had made necessary arrangements for bank guarantees (on 31 October). The RNAC also claims that the second instruction from the PAC reached it only on 30 November, the day the Lauda aircraft had left Europe for Kathmandu.

Also in circulation is what is called a "red booklet" that sets to prove that there was corruption in the deal, without saying where, how much or how. The 27-page booklet entitled the *Facts about Lauda Episode* delves into the nitty-gritty of decision-making at the RNAC, pointing out that the corporation extended the lease of a Chinese aircraft for a year the same day the deal was signed with Lauda. Another point raised is that the leased aircraft is more than two years over the 10-year age limit of aircraft it said it would lease and that the plane did not belong to Lauda but had been sub-leased from a third Hong Kong party. The booklet also concludes that the corporation did not need the fourth jet (although RNAC says it fits into its 15-year expansion plan). The red document concludes that everyone from Prime Minister Koirala to the staff who assisted RNAC's former executive director Hari Bhakta Shrestha in clinching the deal is "responsible". (The CIAA is yet to press formal charges against any of these officials, including Shrestha who was suspended upon its recommendation.)

The paper concludes that because the prime minister was mainly responsible for the incident, it was objectionable for him to remain in PM. The little red book goes on to print flight use data and compares it with reduction in airline passengers—apples and oranges—and comes up with losses that have "resulted" from the deal. The little red book also contains an annexure of "secret" communication between the tourism ministry and the RNAC, and inter-office memos.

IPPF regional office

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is to set up a regional office in Nepal. IPPF President Angela Gomez says having a regional office would mean more information and technical assistance coming into Nepal. The never-ending India-Pakistan tussle is why many international organisations pick Nepal for its regional presence and that seems to have influenced IPPF's decision too. IPPF supports safe abortion, and therefore risks losing funding from its main donor—the new conservative administration in the United States. That is not going to stop the 180-member organisation from advocating safe abortion, which could also become legal in Nepal if the 11th Amendment to the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code) is passed by parliament.

Pushkar loses bike

Our very own round-the-world cyclist, Pushkar Shah, had his bike stolen in Auckland, New Zealand 16 February. Shah has already spent two years on the road, carrying with him soil from Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace, that he wants to take to every country in the world. *Wave*, a sister publication of *Nepali Times*, has been publishing Shah's diary for over a year now. The theft prompted Sir Edmund Hillary to go on state television and make an appeal for the return of the stolen bike. The bike was found later, but it was damaged and Shah is reported to have lost all his personal possessions, including cameras, and publicity material given to him by the Nepal Tourism Board. He estimates that he will need \$2000 to continue on his journey. The Agricultural Development Bank at Baneshwor has opened a current account #012364 for those who might want to make donations.



The health of nations

STEPHEN BEZRUCHKA
AS TOLD TO NEPALI TIMES

Are *bideshi* doctors good for Nepal? I don't think so. This is not to say that I am against the spirit of volunteerism that brings several medical personnel to Nepal each year, but rather I want to emphasise the importance of prioritising structural medicine.

Take the case of the US. As a country, America has about four percent of the world's total population, yet Americans spend almost half of all the money spent on medical care. With such a record, America should be pretty healthy. But this is not the case. In 1970, the US stood 15th in what I call the "Health Olympics", the ranking of countries by life expectancy or infant mortality. Twenty years later, the US is about 20th, and in recent years has plunged even further to around 25th, behind almost all the rich countries, and a few poor ones. For the richest and most powerful country in the world's history, this is a disgrace.

Widening disparities between rich and poor are responsible for poor health, and medicare in Nepal is too urban-centric and of little benefit to the bottom half of the population. The rich do not have medical insurance. The increasing number of tertiary-care hospitals only serve to subsidise medical services for the rich. More private hospitals is not the

This *bideshi* doctor looks like Noam Chomsky, has written Nepal's first trekking guide, and swears by John Rawls' theory of justice.

answer either, in fact it's something I describe as the growing "nursing-home-isation" of Nepal. It is structural medicine that Nepal needs, and that can come through minimising disparities—not only raising the level of the poor but also lowering that of the rich. Quite radical ideas for such an economically-driven society.

One radical idea for keeping Nepal healthy was abandoned soon after it was implemented. In 1978, a group of WHO consultants helped set up the first medical school in Nepal, with the idea of training doctors to work in rural areas. The purpose was not to give them MBBS degrees, but a Bachelor's in Community Medicine. Since this degree was not recognised overseas, graduates demanded to know why their chances of going abroad were being limited. So the initial plan was subverted, and we're feeling the effects, as Nepali health care professionals take off to greener pastures.

There are three main laws of population health: 1) human populations are by nature healthy, 2) health is primarily related to the hierarchical structure of society (poorer people have poorer health),

and 3) structural medicine is the primary means to achieve health for populations. But people are indoctrinated to think in terms of what we can do individually to produce health. Research during this last decade has shown that the health of a group of people is not affected substantially by individual behaviours such as smoking, diet and exercise, by genetics or by the use of health care. In countries where basic goods are readily available, people's life-span depends on the hierarchical structure of their society; that is, the size of the gap between rich and poor. A good idea is to look at countries that are healthy.

Japan has the highest life expectancy in the world. Twice as many Japanese men as American men smoke, yet deaths attributable to smoking are half those in the US. This is because after WWII, Japan's hierarchical structure was reorganised so that citizens shared more equally in the economy. That the structure of society is the key to well-being becomes evident when we look at Japanese who emigrate: their health declines to the level of the inhabitants of the new country.

So, what makes a population healthy? What happens to the average

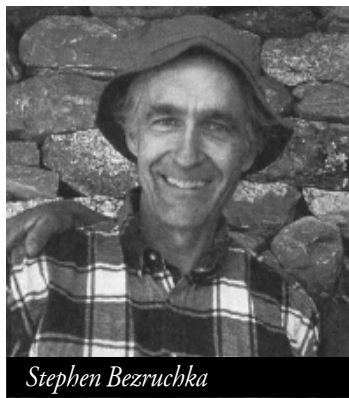
Nepali in this situation? As the gap between rich and poor increases, s/he feels so much more marginalised. This is clearly the major structural factor that affects society. A recent review of archaeological data on the health of pre-agricultural populations has lessons for all of us. The evidence gleaned from skeletal remains suggests that health declined with the advent of agriculture. If we consider the health of a population as its average height (stature), those earliest peoples were tall, and their bones did not show signs of infection or nutritional deficiencies. There were fewer smaller skeletons representing children and infants. All this changed with the progress implied by domesticating plants and animals.

With agriculture, diets became more monotonous and lacked the nutritional variety that hunter-gatherers enjoyed. Workloads increased. But more importantly, a hierarchy emerged, because suddenly there was something to acquire and store. Some could have it while others could be denied. So if you buy the hierarchy-health argument, it was all downhill from there. This is not to imply that hunter-gatherer populations were as healthy as some people today, but one could speculate

that there might not be all that much difference. In the process of progress, we have lost the sense of community and solidarity that characterised early societies, and we have used technology to make up for those losses.

As a physician obsessed with understanding what makes groups of people healthy, I am dumbfounded that America's low ranking doesn't raise more concern in the medical and public-health communities. Is it because experts in these fields don't want to question the role of medical care in producing health? Does the focus on diseases—including the search for risk factors, cures and specific preventive answers—stop Americans from looking at what would really keep them well? I suspect part of the explanation lies in Americans' "cradle to grave" relationship with the health-care industry, which represents one seventh of the US economy. We actually come from a culture of harm in medicare. If all the medical services in the US were stopped now, there wouldn't be many deaths. The same goes for Nepal.

If equality is good medicine, then what can be done to improve our well-being? The primary goal is to



Stephen Bezruchka

reduce today's record gap between rich and poor. Prescriptions for such "structural medicine" might include having more manned health posts in Nepal's vertical terrain, and teaching medical professionals to think of simple, safe, cost-effective therapies, like ether anaesthesia, which Kathmandu's medical school ignores in favour of more expensive, relatively dangerous forms of anaesthesia. The dominant idea, "modern is better", is also what makes *bideshi* doctors welcomed so unquestioningly here. There are better ways to keep our population healthy, like taxing consumption rather than income, or increased support for public transportation and schools, all of which would reflect a change in how the population shares in the economy. The best prescription for health is not necessarily one we get from doctors. ♦

(Stephen Bezruchka, who first came to Nepal in 1969, is best known for his classic guide-book, *Trekking in Nepal*, first published in 1976.)

Teaching teachers



HEMLATA RAI

Nepal's second experiment with a new education policy has educationists and child psychologists enthusiastic, but still rather sceptical about its long-term success. It includes a liberal promotion policy, with a continuous assessment system (CAS) instead of monster year-end exams, and is being implemented on an experimental basis in five districts.

Under the new policy, school children won't need to go through the annual exam—or, indeed, any other kind of exam—to be promoted to higher grades, until grade three. Concerned class teachers, under direct supervision of school headmasters, will now assess children's performance in



the classroom and how well they're learning on a quarterly basis. A resource person (RP) appointed by the concerned District Education Office (DEO) for a cluster of 20-25 schools, observes and provides technical support to the teachers to maintain the individual portfolios for students required for continuous assessment. Under a legal provision introduced a year ago, the RP must be a secondary-level school teacher with a Bachelor's degree. In a three-year pilot phase, the new system will be tried out in 1911 primary schools in Ilam, Chitwan, Syangja, Surkhet and Kanchanpur districts, representing the five development regions.

"The continuous assessment system helps to make our education system more scientific. It allows students to learn in a joyful atmosphere by

relieving them of the mental pressure of preparing for examinations, and it makes teachers more creative in their teaching methods," says Dr Hridaya Ratna Bajracharya, Executive Director of Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID).

The need for change along the lines of the CAS, is clear in the face of alarmingly high dropout and grade repetition rates among primary school students, for both of which failure in examinations has been identified as a major cause. According to official data, the dropout rate in grade one is over 19 percent, nearly five percent in grade two, and four percent in grade three. The repetition rate for grade one is about 39 percent, 18.5 percent for grade two and 15 percent for grade three. The

The new education policy aims at making primary-level learning "joyful" and involving communities in their children's schooling. But it is unlikely to pan out as expected.

government hopes that the introduction of the formative evaluation system in primary schools will lower these indicators "significantly". However, it has not pre-assessed any possible outcome.

The current Ninth Five-Year Plan, under Phase II of the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP), envisages the introduction of formative evaluation in primary schools. This phase also includes the implementation of projects to encourage children from backward ethnic groups and underprivileged communities, the introduction of "alternative schooling" and education for special groups, and community mobilisation for education.

The only factor that threatens the success of the CAS is the fact that primary school teachers are generally not trained to carry out such assessment. A significant number are just high school graduates and have never been formally instructed in teaching methodologies or philosophies of education—according to some studies, only 46 percent of primary school teachers in Nepal are formally trained. In any case, even the formal Teacher Training available in the country doesn't impart continuous assessment skills. "In the first four months following the introduction of the CAS, we've noticed that teachers aren't really motivated to take up the method, because it's hard for a lot of them to understand it conceptually," said Laba Prasad Tripathy, Director of the Primary Education Division at the Department of Education.

Teachers involved in the pilot phase implementation of the CAS were given a five-day training on assessment and teaching methods prior to the official launch. However, headmasters who are supposed to supervise the teachers, were inexplicably left out of the training programme. Other problems such as an ambitious policy change will face are inadequate infrastructure, huge class size and simply not enough teachers in rural schools. Official 1998 data shows that the national average of the teacher to student ratio in Nepal's primary schools is 39 to one, with the central, western and far western development regions burdening their teachers even more.

"Continuous assessment allows learning to be more interactive and it encourages the participation of families and communities in primary education," says Jaya Prasad Lamsal, Curriculum Officer with the Curriculum Development Centre. But, he cautions, "The lack of awareness among communities might not allow this possibility to materialise." There are other fears, too. Hridaya Ratna Bajracharya says: "Despite official commitment, decision-making has not been decentralised. This could cause trouble in implementing the CAS."

The formative evaluation system is popular in the US and Europe. Closer home, it has been successfully implemented in Japan and China. In neighbouring Bangladesh, whose economical and social development, and political functioning is quite similar to Nepal, attempts at introducing the CAS have ended in failure. Nepal first experimented with the method in 1971, when *Naya Sikechhya* was introduced. It was abandoned as a failed experiment after eight years of testing. This second experiment with the method, a Rs 320,000 million project, is being funded by FINIDA. ♦

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(*Conditions apply)

Somewhere in Nepal II

I do not wish to quibble with you for appropriating my name, assuming, of course, you do not have another contributor who shares the quaint appellation my parents chose for me in the VIEWPOINTS column of NT #31. But I would like to take this opportunity to make some observations on some of the issues raised in the column.

Your 72-point headline "Saving Nepal" was probably intended to grab the attention of all those readers who are sick and tired of pontificating analysts who are obsessed with the "cause and effect" paradigm of the Maoist insurgency. I started to read the story with the specific point of reference that the Maoist insurgency is not the only ailment that Nepal needs to be saved from. I was disappointed.

Dipak Gyawali, who has the profound ability to make a human-interest story out of such seemingly everyday issues as the insensitivity shown by the Narayanhity Royal Palace and the Prime Minister's Office in sending out greeting cards, has spoken of the possibility of introducing military conscription. I noted with particular interest that he brought up the model of the National Development Service, a project the panchas so shrewdly abandoned just after the announcement of a national referendum in 1979, which allowed people like me to get a Master's degree without being forced out of Kathmandu for 10 months. Gyawali also cites the Maoists' Jana Sena and the Nepali Congress Mukti Sena as possible models for such an army of conscripts. However, I wonder how a national army formed under a formula suited to the specific ideological and contextual



imperatives of the dialectical materialists and the democratic socialists would help the country.

Following the "Delhi compromise" of 2007 BS (1951 CE), the Mukti Sena was incorporated into the Nepal Police. In light of this fact, is it just a coincidence that Nepal Police was among the first organisations to have succumbed to the systematic process of the "Congressisation" of national institutions following the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990? Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how a demobilised Maoist army would fare in an integrated national armed force. With their

evident skills in high-altitude, low-intensity conflict, maybe the former rebels could be inducted into an expanded Armed Police Force.

Gyawali also recommends legally mandated term limits to stop politics from becoming a career option for the Nepali people. How many aspiring *netajis* would be discouraged from joining politics if that were the case? Moreover, think of all those current *netajis* who, deprived of their primary addiction, would start exhibiting all kinds of withdrawal symptoms. More importantly, for a country with already limited avenues of employment, term limits in politics would only force a sizeable section of

The 72-point headline "Saving Nepal" was probably intended to grab the attention of readers sick and tired of pontificating analysts obsessed with the "cause and effect" paradigm of the Maoist insurgency.

the restive youth population to seek other ways of registering their grievances—the country's bushes, treetops and paddy fields are not the only bases they can expect to use.

With respect to Gyawali's plea for throwing up more Daya Bir Singh Kansakars, all I can say is that many potential Paropakarīs are already throwing up at the current state of affairs.

Stephen Mikesell brings up an interesting point: Seven times more Nepali hill women are abducted to brothels in India every year than people who have been killed in the entire Maoist war. With due respect to the suffering and anguish of these women, I think Mikesell seriously errs when he seeks to equate the bruised and battered living with the mostly mutilated dead.

Responding to the argument that no other alternative works (other than armed insurgency), Mikesell writes "But I don't think the Peruvian Shining Path, to which Nepal's Maoists feel some kinship, has been overwhelmingly successful." That may be true. But neither has the Nepali government been successful in capturing Comrade Prachanda in the way Alberto Fujimori's government arrested Abimael Guzman from his jungle hideout. That puts our Maoist fighters in a psychologically better position than the remnants of their Peruvian counterparts. Moreover, when our Maoist rebels today see former plane hijackers in and around the government, and erstwhile

underground Marxist-Leninist head-hunters of eastern Nepal in the main opposition party, it must rekindle their spirit to fight on for political empowerment.

Mikesell sees in the experience of Brazil's Labour Party a roadmap for a truly democratic Nepal. I see that as a path Nepal rejected long ago—the *Gaun Pharkas* system of indirect elections enshrined through the 2032 BS (1975 CE) amendment to the Panchayat constitution. Concepts like recall (*punarawhan*) and cooption (*sahabaram*) were tried and tested in those bad old days. But, then, who had the patience to wait for the Panchayat system to fully evolve into the participatory system it was trying its best to become?

Pratyoush Onta correctly says the Maoists have shown that besides the two power centres in Nepal, Narayanhity Darbar and Singha Darbar, there can also be a Darbar in Rolpa. Extending his point, I would say that the Maoists have also encouraged the creation of a third army, after the Royal Nepal Army and the Jana Sena. If the recent ordinance manages to break through the deadlock in parliament, this will mark the first time since Mohan Sumsher—when he was still Shree Teen, and not yet head of the democratic coalition government that replaced the Ranarchy—that Singha Darbar will have a full-fledged fighting force at its disposal.

In sentences couched in the

political correctness of multiparty Nepal, Onta maintains the palace is the major obstacle to the deployment of the army in quelling the Maoist rebellion. But, then, what else could the palace have done when all other political parties, including the Deuba-Bhattarai faction of the ruling Nepali Congress, are in favour of seeing the problem resolved politically? This assertion of royal prerogative might be inconsistent with the spirit of constitutional provisions, but it is in keeping with the king's role as the protector of the constitution. Onta wonders how the palace would stand to benefit ultimately from this royal (in)action. I think the palace gains by proving that a constitutional monarch need not necessarily follow a politically expedient route the ruling faction of a deeply fractured party has chosen without respecting the views of the dissident camp.

Without digressing too much, I am also appalled by the lack of appreciation in this whole debate for one core reality of the Nepali monarchy and its policy on the military. It would be foolish on our part to believe that the reigning monarch of a dynasty that has always taken pride in incorporating petty principalities into a united Nepal through *umasik* military conquests, as Gyawali puts it, would want to become party to the fragmentation of the country through the mobilisation of the military against the Maoists. ♦

"Development" vs the Maoists

If "development" was real, why was Rapti zone so favourable for the development of the Maoist movement?

It seems that Nepali Times wants the US Ambassador and other donors to move to Maoist-affected areas with development packages, and the US Ambassador said he and other donors are ready to do that (#29). Both agree that the Maoist-affected areas desperately need donors. Nepali Times would like them to take action immediately, while donors want to wait until Maoist issue is resolved.

I strongly believe that donors, including Americans, should not be allowed to operate in the poverty-stricken rural areas of Nepal, not before the Maoist issue is solved to the government's satisfaction, and not even after the issue is solved as desired by the donors. And the reason I say so is because of what we saw of the USAID-implemented Rapti Zone Rural Area Development Project. That project, and its second incarnation, the Rapti Development Project, aimed to fulfil the basic needs of the poor majority, the farmers of the mid-hills. The programme spent about \$50 million in "improving household food production and consumption, improved income generating opportunities for poor farmers, landless labourers, occupational castes, and women". In short, the project's overall goal was to increase the well-being of the people.

The Americans thought they'd need 15 years to achieve their objectives. And, going by their reports, they worked "hard" for those 15 years. The project started in 1980 and ended in 1995, just a month and a half before the Maoists began their armed movement. Everyone knows Rapti Zone is the stronghold of the Nepali Maoists. In mid-1998 Maoists declared nine districts as their base—three of these are in Rapti Zone. Of the 26 Maoists killed by the police between February 1997 and March 1998, 22 were from Rapti Zone. The government and donors both say development packages will help eliminate the Maoists. If that were true, why was Rapti Zone so favourable for the development of the Maoist movement? If that is what you get after 15 years of American-funded development, we were perhaps better without it.

Nepali Times and the Nepali government should not search for assistance from donors to solve the Maoist issue. The right solution was prescribed by R. Andrew Nickson of the University of Birmingham in his paper "Democratisation and the growth of communism in Nepal: A Peruvian scenario in the making". Nickson wrote in 1992 (long before the Maoists began their armed struggle): "The future prospects of Maoism in Nepal will similarly depend largely on the extent to which the newly-elected Nepali Congress government addresses the historic neglect and discrimination of the small rural communities which still make up the overwhelming bulk of the population of the



country. ... Successful implementation of such a programme would mean a radical shake-up of the public administration system in order to make it both more representative of the ethnic diversity of the country and more responsive to the needs of peasant communities."

The ruling party has done little in that direction. As Nickson continued: "However, such a scenario is extremely unlikely, given the entrenched power of the landed aristocracy supported by the armed forces, the highly traditional and Brahmin-dominated public administration and the shallow and ambivalent

democracy. The Nepali Congress has stood against *kamaiyas*. Chandra Shumsher proved much more progressive than the Nepali Congress if we compare the abolition of slavery and of the *kamaiya* system. The Nepali Congress supported 'high-caste' groups in their conflict with dalits in eastern Nepal. And on the issue of women's property rights, the Congress stance can be compared to the Taliban's. For its part, the 'pro-poor' UML too has supported the cause of big landlords when the commission it set up recommended doing away with the rights given to tenant farmers by King Mahendra in the mid-60s. ♦

ideology of the Nepali Congress Party itself. If, as seems extremely likely, the Nepali Congress Party fails to deliver serious structural improvements in land tenure and in service delivery by the public administration, then, in the face of deteriorating living conditions in general, and growing unemployment of secondary school leavers in particular, the fragile centre-ground of Nepali politics may well begin to disintegrate, thereby widening the degree of tacit support for revolutionary solutions such as that proposed by Masal." [The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is one of the offshoots from Masal.]

Things have turned out as Nickson feared. The only way out of the Maoist insurgency is a political force ready to create a democratic Nepal. So far, neither the Nepali Congress nor the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (UML) has shown true commitment to

PATA award for Sirubari

Nepal's Sirubari Village Tourism Project has been awarded the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) Gold Award 2001 in recognition for its "exceptional achievement" and innovation. The prize is to be handed over when PATA meets for its convention in Malaysia on 9 April.

Sirubari is a Gurung village located about 20 km southwest of Pokhara. The village has mainly stone and slate houses and no electricity but its trails are well kept and the houses have clean toilets. Tourists visiting Sirubari are expected to live with families. The villagers provide accommodation and the meals are what the hosts themselves eat. There is running water in the village and tourists are provided hot water for showers. The money that tourists pay to stay in Sirubari goes directly to the residents, a major goal of village tourism.

Vehicle ban extended

The Supreme Court has extended its previous "interim order" instructing the government not to import Indian vehicles based on Self Certification until the final hearing on 12 March. The two-judge bench headed by Chief Justice Keshav Prasad Upadhyaya issued the order on 20 February. (For more on Self Certification, see India-Nepal, NT #31 and Artha Beed, NT #26.)

The Court had issued a two-week ban on Indian vehicles on 12 January and asked the defendants to present themselves in court within 15 days. Three non-governmental organisations Pro-public, Martin Chautari and Leaders Nepal filed the writ seeking the order on 26 December. The petition challenges the government's decision to allow the import of India-made vehicles on the basis of Self Certification, which they say is against the Nepal Mass Vehicle Emission Standard-2056 (BS). The government says Self Certification was allowed to Indian vehicle makers, because Nepal allows other car making countries the same privilege. Nepal's emission standard requires both "Type Approval" and "Conformity of Production" (COP) for importing vehicles. The fight is over whether the COP issued by Indian companies is acceptable.

Himalayan Expo

Nepal's pioneer exhibition group Himalayan Expo is organising its 11th exposition in Kathmandu 20-24 April. Nearly 210 exhibitors from 8-10 countries are expected to set up stalls, say organisers, who are also making a special effort to promote Nepali exports. According to a press release of the House of Rajkarnikar Exhibitions & Events, it plans to fly in about 20 foreign buyers, on an all expense paid trip. Qatar Airways is to provide another 50-75 percent discount on airfare plus two nights of free accommodation for all "genuine" international buyers. The organisers say they expect to attract over 45,000 business visitors, among others.

Jute cultivation shrinks

Reports from east Nepal, the main jute-growing belt in the country, say that the area under cultivation has been shrinking every year, despite a growing market for the finished product both in the country and abroad. The local jute mills of Biratnagar are even asking farmers to produce more of the crop, which they promise to purchase at "reasonable prices." The production capacity of jute mills in Morang and Sunsari district is about 60,000 tonnes but the supply of raw material is barely 24,000 tonnes. Growers cite of frequent breakdown of the mills and instability in prices as reasons for not growing the crop. Nepal exported Rs1.10 billion worth of jute goods to India in fiscal 1999-2000.

Pokhara tourist count

The overall slump in tourist arrivals in 2000 has also had an impact in Pokhara, the second major stop for travellers visiting Nepal. Pokhara got 10,000 fewer Indian tourists in 2000 compared to a year ago, when 105,000 visited the city. The Pokhara Tourist Office, which used to compile statistics based on information provided by travel and trekking agencies, has begun collecting data from hotels and lodges also. About 22 percent of all tourists visiting Nepal make a trip to Pokhara, and 35 percent of all visitors there are Indians. Pokhara has about 350 hotels, which collectively provide about 4,500 beds every day. The city also has 75 travel and trekking agencies.



Bandh stats

Finally, an economist has attempted to assess the impact of what has become a pastime of almost every political party worth its name. Professor of economics at the Tribhuvan University, Bishnu Prasad Sharma, calculates that Nepal had 190 *chakka-jams* in 1999-2000, which accounted for a total loss of 2.3 million work hours. Sharma has looked closely at the service industry, and claims that each worker there contributes \$1,391 to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and that this sector adds \$1.12 value per hour worked. Tek Bahadur Dangi of the Nepal Tourism Board had something else to add: About 40 percent of tourists visiting Nepal are coming for the second time, and strikes and chakka-jams are likely to discourage them from paying another visit, he says.

Rox restaurant

The Hyatt Regency Kathmandu opened the Rox Restaurant and Bar, a three level dining and entertainment centre at the newly opened hotel near Baudhanath. Rox, which has a capacity of around 200, will have a restaurant on the top floor which will serve home-style European cuisine with an emphasis on family-style dining, and exotic desserts. There will be indoor and outdoor seating, and also counter seating at the show kitchen. The mezzanine level takes a cue from the lounge craze in Europe and the US, and features couches, cognac and cigars. The lowest level is the Rox Bar, which will have a live band or a DJ nightly. The Rox Restaurant and Bar is stylishly designed, with plenty of faux-stone, polished black granite and blond wood.

The Hotel aims to attract Kathmandu residents, the top level of tourists and also convention travellers with this new addition. Is it too far out for locals to go to? Distance is all in the mind, says the Hyatt's marketing team, pointing out that a cab ride from Naxal to the hotel costs the same as going from Naxal to New Road.



Travails in eastern Nepal

The issues we focus on in Kathmandu are different from the cares and concerns of eastern Nepal.

a visit to the closed mills in the mills area of Biratnagar has made this Beed write about impressions of the current economic scenario in the eastern parts of the country. Once a city that bred industrialists and leaders at equal pace, Biratnagar is now mainly a city with a good highway. It seems like the incessant construction at sites of new industries is over, and, like elsewhere in the country, very little seems to be really happening. The city is fairly politically active, as a round of the colleges showed during the student elections. There are more people now who survive only because they know politicians and have taken on the part of power-brokers. This is seen as preferable to other economic activities, and although the risks are high, the returns are pretty good. There are new buildings on the city's horizon that are visible proof of this new profession. The city now devotes itself to churning out professional politicians and power-brokers at the cost of the other development. Unemployment and under-employment also remain a big issue here as there are more young people who now see success in political careers rather than careers that would be a more sustainable in the future. The trade exhibition held in Biratnagar last week was a dismal reminder of these developments. Labour problems are another

serious issue here, and once again, it is the influence that political parties exert on unions that is seen as the root of the matter. Because of this, most industries are now seriously considering alternatives to setting up new manufacturing units here. Labour issues aside, there's this sense of fear pervading many parts of eastern Nepal, including Biratnagar. At all places discussions centre around on extortionist groups that have made kidnapping an everyday matter. In the guise of insurgents, they seize any opportunity to strike. Some of these operations are carried out from across the porous border. There are many business groups that are thinking of relocating their operations, some outside their respective towns or cities, and some even outside the country. The long-term impact of such moves is extremely worrying. The much-hyped Hrithik episode, centered around Kathmandu, seems to have had little impact, and the much-touted *pabadi-madhesi* divide is perceived here more as the agenda of political parties. Certainly, business is not feeling it in the least, being much more worried about extortion, kidnapping and threats. But, the emergence here, too, of associations based on ethnicity does make one wonder what the future of ethnic affiliations is in this part of the country. Perhaps we should start

thinking now and try and anticipate the impact of disruptions in economic activities in the future due to issues of ethnicity. We've seen communal issues affect business the world over, and there are pro-active preemptive measure we can take now. The town of Dharan, in comparison with most places in eastern Nepal, seems almost like an oasis in terms of economic activity. The consumption and spending in this township has been historically very high, and it continues to be so. The slowing of development here after the closing down of the Gurkha Recruitment Camp is history, and BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences has catalysed a resurgence of the local economy. Shops are getting cutlifits and there are positively cutting-edge efforts like www.dharanonline.com. There are a lot of public partnership programs for road building, and the town is kept spic and span. Personally, this was the only town that had a positive vibe and anything resembling a positive future. This trip has been a tremendous learning experience for this Beed—we all need to keep reminding ourselves how different the issues we get caught up in in Kathmandu are from the cares and concerns in this part of Nepal. ♦

(Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com)

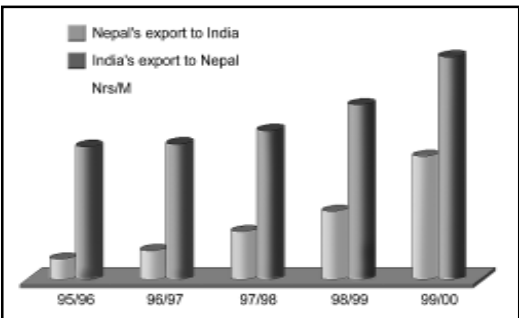
from p1

BUSINESS NOT AS USUAL

In 1995/96 Nepal's exports to India were NRs 3.68bn, by 1999/00 it had swelled to NRs 22.62bn. Indian exports, on the other hand, grew from Rs24.39bn to NRs 40.93bn in the same period. Nepal's trade deficit with India has remained about the same. But with the present bad blood generated in New Delhi, it may not be business as usual. If the concerns of Indian manufacturers in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are not appeased, they will continue to clamour about the treaty and its automatic renewal. This is a difficult situation for Nepal: some inefficient and protectionist businesses in the border states want to turn on the heat on Nepal, and they are using the treaty as a scapegoat. And by all indications, New Delhi is listening to them because it fits in nicely with its own security threat perceptions from neighbours like Nepal.

What all this means is that the days of the Gujral Doctrine of non-reciprocity with India's smaller neighbours are over. Former Indian Prime Minister IK Gujral was the architect of the 1996 treaty, and his argument was trade would allow the neighbours to prosper and present less of a security threat to India.

- So, to recap:
- India says there has been a "surge" (an unnatural growth in export of certain products). Nepal's response: yes, exports of some goods may have grown fast, but let's define "surge" and look at individual products.
 - Indian investors in Nepal businesses want more industrial security and less delays in permits for non-Nepali staff. Nepal response: nil. Caught between a divided ruling party, an aggressive opposition, and the Maoists, the government has had little time to look into such matters.
 - Indian businesses have also brought up the treaty clause on equal treatment, especially as regards the Nepali court ban on the import of Indian vehicles pending resolution of the emission standards issue. Nepali position: the ban applies only to vehicles that don't have Type Certification by the government of India and some Indian cars are still coming in.
 - All Nepali business wants from India is predictability so that trade can continue to grow without obstacles from petty business lobbies, media and bureaucrats every time a Nepali product outsells an Indian one.
- The 1996 treaty has a clause to address the issue of "surge". It stipulates that whenever there is a surge, "the two governments shall enter into consultation with a view to taking appropriate measures." (read: Kathmandu shall acquiesce and clamp down on any exports that India objects to). Surge is tricky, partly because it is entirely up to India to define what it is. Also, a product that surges in



one market may be scarce in another and is often corrected by demand and supply. Again to sell more is what all business is about.

The issue of security hinges on the Maoist insurgency, and may be beyond anybody's control. But nitty-gritty labour issues have been a problem mainly because the government has been too distracted with trying to survive day to day. The court injunction on Indian vehicles because of litigation by environment groups here is the latest concern for India. A Nepali vehicle importer has also filed a writ questioning the ban, which is what FNCCI has been using to assuage Indian tempers. "Left to us we can resolve the economic and trade matters ourselves," another Nepali member at the JEC meeting told us. "But there also seem to be larger political issues at play about which we can do little."

FNCCI officials say a value addition amendment to the 1996 treaty will not hurt genuine manufacturers. Those that will be hit are fly-by-night companies that have found loopholes to qualify for zero-duty exports. FNCCI has launched a study on the value addition in all Nepali exports to see if it comes within the 30 percent (Nepali and Indian inputs) that is the benchmark now being discussed. The study is to be completed by 13 March.

India has set 30 percent value addition for Sri Lankan exports and is also negotiating a similar treaty with Bangladesh, which is demanding a pact similar to that between Nepal and India. A 30 percent benchmark may affect some Nepali exports, wires made from scrap, for example, but other major products may still fall within the range. CII is also said to have assured FNCCI that it would do its best to ask the Indian Government to give products already being exported from Nepal, but which don't meet the value addition criteria, some more time to come within the acceptable range. Most importantly, these changes could be a wake-up call for Nepali businesses to turn more business-like because all trade favours will end after the World Trade Organisation regime takes over. ♦



COURTESY PREM BAJRACHARYA

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

There's little left to say about the lure of gleaming gold. Suffice it to say that other than the visceral desire the metal seems to awaken in people, in a culture such as ours, where a man's measure is often the weight of his wife's jewellery, gold has even more significance as a marker of status.

But the profile of gold jewellery and its buyers is now changing. For one, the consumption of wearable gold is no longer restricted to the elite, but is also finding a market among middle-class consumers. For another, many of these new buyers are demanding more fancy work in their jewellery, albeit in a lighter form than used to be the



Prem Bajracharya

norm. The business of goldsmithing itself is being affected by these changes, and also by the entry of new players into the jewellery segment, and by the narrowing of traditional avenues of business, like the underground gold trade between Nepal and India.

Goldsmiths are not a particularly happy lot these days. "There has not been as much business as was expected, and this during the marriage season," says Jyotsna Shrestha, proprietor of Marigold Jewellers. The influx of Indian businesses into the gold jewellery market, once dominated by traditional Newari goldsmiths, is changing the face of the sector. Indian goldsmiths and jewellery businesses have succeeded in penetrating the Nepali market not just because they have more capital to invest. They're also offering a restless clientele greater choice—more "modern" choice. "Most of our clients today prefer modern designs, especially those with a little Mughal or Bengali touch," says Shrestha.

Until not very long ago, gold was an investment, an index of economic security, and so, when ordering jewellery, the aim was to have heavy pieces, which required lots of gold. But times have changed, and gold is increasingly being seen as a fashion accessory rather than a statement of long-term financial well-being—not everyone wants to walk around weighed down by half their family fortune at social and religious occasions. More want jewellery that comes a little cheaper and

All that Glitter

Nepal's traditional gold and silver craftsmen are facing a two-pronged challenge—from new investors and changing tastes.

lighter, for reasons of personal finance, taste and variety. Admittedly, though, many "modern" jewellery designs are as, if not more, expensive than traditional designs, because of the clamour for the ornate look. Heavier traditional jewellery is still bought, especially during the marriage season, but there's no shame now to be seen wearing lighter pieces, and people are finding fewer opportunities to appreciate the work of traditional craftsmen whose skills have taken years to hone, and been handed down many generations.

Nowadays people proficient in making a lot of frills out of a little gold are in demand—credible though it may sound, the Nepal Gold and Silver Dealers' Association (NSGDA) claims that over 60 percent of the craftsmen in jewellery shops in town that sell more contemporary styles are from India. Many of the Valley's traditional goldsmiths see this as an "unhealthy encroachment" on what is traditional territory, one the government has done little to stop. "The idea of a free market economy with healthy competition is not bad, but what the Indian businessmen can invest here in comparison to Nepalis is not healthy," says a frustrated Tej Ratna Shakya, who has a traditional gold jewellery store. Shakya is also chairman of the NSGDA, an umbrella group for people who deal in the metals, whether wholesale or as jewellery for the retail market. "Besides, there have been cases where Indian shops have fraudulently sold relatively impure gold to customers."

(None of the five Indian dealers we approached wanted to talk to us.)

The NSGDA is putting up quite a fight—membership to the Association is restricted to Nepali citizens and consumers are welcome to register any complaints.

Not everyone is as alarmist as the NSGDA. Nirmal Shrestha, proprietor of the Gems Ornaments Emporium, believes it is a level playing field, and says: "The arrival of Indian goldsmiths was an eye-opener. It showed the true potential of the market to Nepali goldsmiths. Modern

designs are expensive compared to traditional ones even though they use less gold than traditional designs. We did not know that there were people who wanted and could afford such designs."

24K on New Road is another well-established gold jewellery shop that has kept up with changing trends. "Only tourists demand traditional jewellery—although they do make up about 25 percent of our sales," says proprietor Devendra Shrestha, who is also moving in to stones and other valuable metals. "Profit margins in gold have been stagnant, and even decreased over the last six years. Consumers are looking towards stones and other valuable metals not just because they're fashionable, but also because they are equally expensive."

Prem Bajracharya of Thimi is one goldsmith who is dealing with change in his own way. His family has been in the business for ten generations, and his sons seem to be following in his footsteps, but with a little innovation here and there. Unlike Kathmandu and Lalitpur consumers, most women in Thimi and nearby areas still prefer traditional designs with just a touch of the modern. Bal Kumari Maharjan has come to Bajracharya's shop to improve her set of gold earrings. She gazes at the gleaming new necklaces on display and says: "I still prefer the old ones." But there is also 15-year-old Sita Kalle begging her grandfather to buy her a pair of gold earrings, and she wants one of the newer designs.

There are plenty of people, especially in rural areas who, like Maharjan, still go for traditional designs, as their purchasing power continues to operate within the notion of investment and financial security. It is in these rural areas that traditional craftsmanship will probably survive, with a few changes, and for Nepali buyers, rather than as a symbol of ancient, unchanging Nepal to be taken back by tourists. "From the business point of view I have to also think about clients' interests, but personally I am only interested in making traditional jewellery," says Prem Bajracharya. He's even helped foreigners learn about his traditional skills. One of them, Hannilore Gabriel, has already published a book,



Jewellery of Nepal, and is planning another book dedicated to Newari jewellery.

Nepal's land is not especially rich in gold—panning for the yellow metal in the hills and on riverbeds like the Kali Gandaki, the Rapti and the Trishuli yields only around 50 kg annually, and much of this never makes it into formal circuits of exchange because it is not pure enough. Historically, the major part of the gold used in Nepal has been imported, usually from India but now also from other places like Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. According to the NSGDA, an average of 12 tons of gold is imported annually, of which 60 percent is said to be consumed in the Valley. An average of Rs 163.85 million worth of gold jewellery has been exported since 1993-1994.

These figures, however, do not take into account the small amounts people are allowed to bring in after extended stays abroad. Nor does it consider the gold that is smuggled in and then out, although this has become significantly less profitable due to the prices levelling off in the international market and easier access to supplies. It is said that many made their fortunes illegally selling gold imported into Nepal in the Indian market. In the heyday of gold smuggling, the profit margin on a *tola* of gold (1 *tola* = 11.664 gm) could exceed Rs 2,000. But NSGDA officials deny any knowledge of smuggling. "We hear that smuggling has decreased considerably," says Tej Ratna Shakya.

These factors, combined with the easing of import restrictions on gold in India, have put something of a damper on a sector already facing new difficulties. How Nepal's gold and jewellery business will handle these transitions is anybody's guess. The NSGDA can't really do anything about changing tastes—people will buy what they want to—and blaming the Indians cannot be the answer. Possibly the best way for

goldsmiths to remain in business is by finding innovative ways to sell what they're best at. They can't just sit around waiting for the tide to turn and for their styles to become retro-chic.

There will be interesting developments in the industry if the trend towards modern styles goes on its logical trajectory, and gold jewellery truly becomes a fashion accessory. Then, consumers will stop insisting on 24K or 22K gold, and won't object to, say, 14K jewellery. This isn't as far-out as it sounds. In India, which is where Nepali customers and jewellers get their inspiration from, it has already happened. Traditional jewellery is seen in a different context, as serious stuff that needn't necessarily be abandoned to indulge in one's taste for the contemporary. The two are just bought and worn in different contexts. ♦

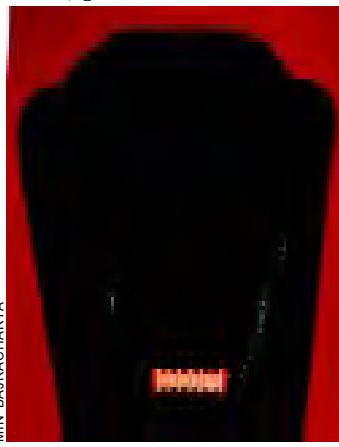
Clockwise from top left: A Newar woman from Thimi in traditional finery. Bhuswan is the gold ornament worn on the head by Newari brides, the necklace is called Tayo. Customers throng Prem Bajracharya's shop in Thimi (above); a finely decked Magar girl at a rally (below); traditional ornaments on display (bottom).



MIN BAJRACHARYA



COURTESY PREM BAJRACHARYA

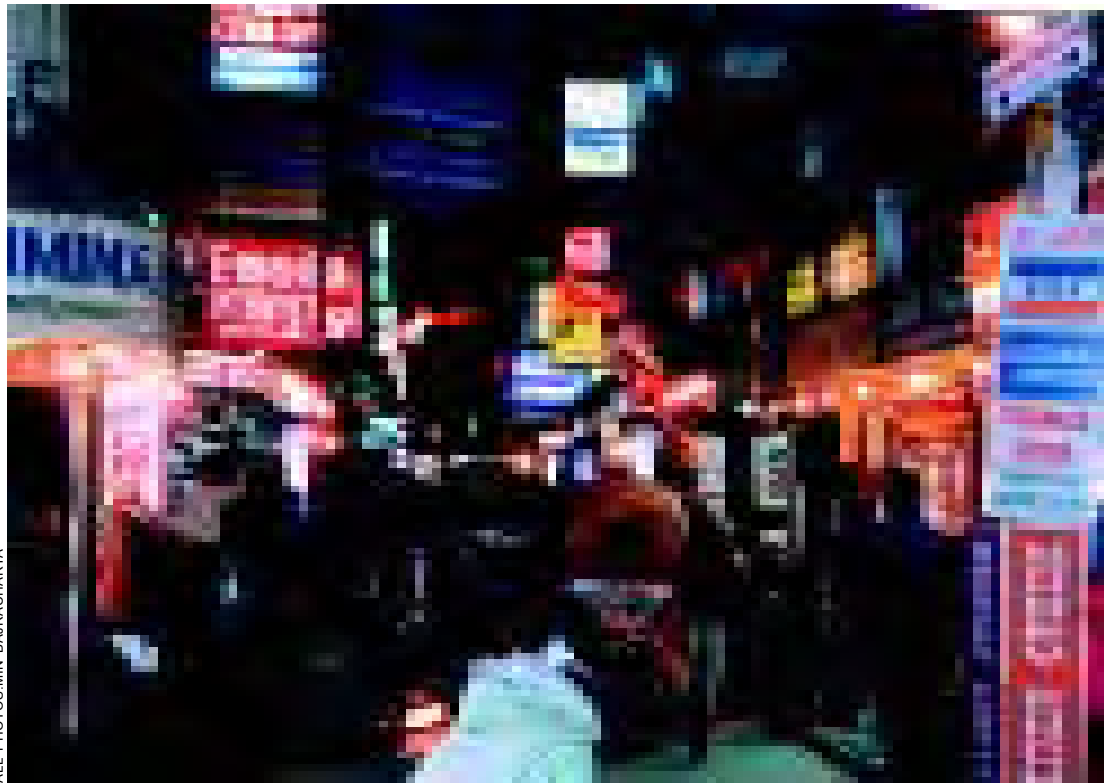


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A NEPALI TIMES REPORT

So you think you know Thamel? Maybe you do and maybe you don't. People who've seen Thamel change over three decades say that in order to understand what it is all about, you have to understand how your experience is different from your best friend's.

Caveats out of the way, comes the hard part—explaining what makes Thamel such a special place. Sure, it's a melting pot, smörgåsbrot, fruit salad, grab-bag, chamber orchestra playing rock and reggae, but what *is* its secret? It might lie in the tolerance and contradictions that often come with cosmopolitanism. A delightfully busy, and picturesque street scene might be something like this—a street urchin sings to the tunes of his sarangi, seemingly oblivious that across the street is a music shop pounding with trance beats. People say that being

dread and being hairless, being one colour or the other, preferring one mode of speech, clothing, behaviour or the other, none of this matters in Thamel. This is debatable for others have noticed numerous subtle and not-so-subtle tensions in the air, few of them threatening, it is true, but present nevertheless.

It all began for Thamel (then Thabaha) in the early seventies when Nepal became a destination for people as interested in adventure sports as in hash and ganja. Freak Street—Jhoche—could not expand any more to provide all the facilities that increasing numbers of tourists demanded. Accommodation was a big factor, as most Freak Street lodges were really converted residences with low-ceilinged rooms that had been partitioned into tiny dwelling spaces for people too stoned to notice much.

Newer hostels and hotels in Thamel, though, were being built

with budget tourists in mind. One of the first was the legendary Kathmandu Guest House, which opened in 1970, and offered more modern amenities than low-end travellers had ever seen in Kathmandu. It was a tremendous success, and slowly, the charms of Freak Street began to fade. Karna Shakya, the man behind Kathmandu Guest House says: "It was not my dream to cause the fall of Jhoche when I opened Kathmandu Guest House. Freak Street died a natural death because theirs wasn't sustainable tourism. Tourists might adjust to the culture of Freak Street for a few days, just for the experience, but for how long? Ultimately they will need hamburger and chicken."

Budget travellers looking for the best bargain, adventure tourists returning from a hectic trek, Valley residents looking to unwind, Thamel has something for everyone—food, accommodation, souvenirs or just a

good drink at the end of a hard day. It really is the only place in South Asia with a cafe culture. Shopping is an integral part of a Thamel visit. There are great music shops like Dexo and East and West that thankfully go a little beyond meditative, repetitive chants that seem to lose some of their charm when heard outside Thamel. Expensive jewellery, Tibetan antiques, pashmina, rice paper products, books, and those rather hideous crazy hats—the choices are numerous and so are the prices. If you're looking for *thankas*, wood-carvings or metalwork, you'll have to fish around a bit, but if you're short on time, you could always settle for less serious purchases like wooden masks, *khukuris*, Buddhist prayer bells and wheels, silver ornaments, baskets or puppets. The real question is what is "authentic" enough to be a Nepali handicraft. Or, you could avoid the question altogether and buy, or have made, a corny T-shirt with, say a map of the Langtang trek or unattractive hippy-style clothing that has never been out



of fashion in Thamel. Every item on display has a distinct Thamel feel to it. It's the stuff of tourist ghettos and that's what sells—crazy hats, tiger balm, miniature chess sets and hash.

Buyers and sellers are constantly

THA

If equal parts of happiness and exasperation have packed with people, shops, pubs, restaurants, pool parlours and cybercafes, they've done in

trying to drive a hard bargain for room, board or curio. Thamel's bible, the *Lonely Planet*, advises tourists to bargain—"Whenever you shop remember to bargain. Subtract 20 percent and get a good benchmark as to what you should pay on the street if you are an excellent bargainer"—and so hustlers and shopkeepers alike have their share of informed hagglers. But it's tough doing business here,

this way, for so do the beggars, the "one-rupee" kids, and all the other hustlers who invite you down dingy side-streets for heaven knows what.

In between shopping and being hustled, there's also time to be amazed by the variety and sheer number of bookstores. Here, you can browse through and buy coffee-table glossies, a wide range of fiction and non-fiction, maps, postcards, guidebooks, and foreign newspapers and magazines. The oldest bookshop, Tamang Tantric, was founded by Johnny Lama and then taken over by a man known simply as Shyam. Between the two of them, they've spawned other stores, like Barnes & Noble (no relation to the superstore chain) and Walden, whose owner Ram Hari worked with Shyam. The other big Thamel literary name is, of course, Pilgrim's Book House. There are other excellent, slightly wacky bookshops, like Good Earth, which is run by a Newari poet, and the amazing Nightingale. Nightingale is owned by a man who goes by the unlikely name of "Paki", who used to work with Lama at Tamang Tantric. Paki decided he loved all things Japanese, and the shop has a wonderful collection of Japanese

Hits FM

MEEL

ave ever lain in winding, narrow streets
hostels, travel and tour agencies, video and
Thamel.

books, and Paki even speaks some Japanese and, at least two people swear, Cantonese. If that isn't enough, the shop has a first edition collection amazon.com would do well to swiftly acquire.

Nightingale even occasionally has a fortune-teller, which is a bit like bringing coals to Newcastle—Thamel has many people who will read your palm, Tarot cards, tea-leaves, horoscope, and even, if you don't mind being stared at, your face. There's the legendary Lalji, who looks at your handprint and gives you the pleasure of hearing him talk about you for 60 uninterrupted minutes and, yes, you can tape him. Kathmandu Guest House, which has everything a person could want, houses a little old Sikh fortune-teller in its compound.

You might do better, fortune-wise, if you seek out wisdom in the mountains, though, as we heard a trekking gear salesman telling a foolish-looking customer who'd dared question the integrity of boots he was eyeing, "Only in mountains understanding will come [of how good the boots are]." The customer was right in being sceptical—Thamel no longer sells quality used gear, but instead, knock-offs of every major outdoors label you can think of. Boots, sleeping bags and down jackets (the "down" being chicken feathers, so don't be surprised if you start smelling like a poultry farm gone horribly wrong), fleeces and such are usually fine and suit most purposes except serious climbing. But beware the "Gore-Tex", it can let you down badly. Gear bought, time to begin the quest for "understanding", and what better

place to do it than Thamel—the place has more trekking and tour agencies per square inch than any other part of the world catering to the adventure tourist. Great choice, but again watch out for the occasional hustler.

Then again, you really don't have to go anywhere. Thamel presents endless opportunities to gain Knowledge of Life. Just actually go down one of those mysterious looking sidestreets, consider sampling the herbal delights every second person seems to sell here, spend five days with a hustler and write a Tom Wolfe-Joan Didion-style essay, or go to places where friendly travellers and hardcore "seekers" congregate. To hear about border crossings, go to the legendary Pumpnickel Bakery in the mornings, to admire mountaineering exploits, go to Rum Doodle Restaurant in the evenings and read the signed footprints with amusing expedition tales, and if you see anyone walk out without paying their bill, you've just seen a legend—climb Everest and you can wine and dine for free here for the rest of your life.

The multi-level sun-decks and terraces scattered everywhere lull people into a contemplative and extra-friendly mood. In Thamel, there are no strangers, only possible friends. The bars and clubs in the evening are possibly the best places in the world to meet people. For dancing, the Underground is fun and friendly, the Jump Club is alive with sharklike men and women checking each other out, and the Tunnel is where the backpacker glitterati go. For a glimpse of old-school Thamel bar culture, go to Tom & Jerry, which has been

around since 1984, or Tongues & Tales, also the big thing about ten years ago—both still attract a decent crowd of Kathmandu residents and, usually, Brits and Aussies. There's what we call Kathmandu Eternal—Sam's Bar, where overlanders, artists, writers and loads of Thamel institutions and just plain interesting people gather around the fire, and Maya Cocktail Bar, which has great drinks and a serious happy hour, plays excellent music—loads of Miles Davis, Massive Attack and acid jazz, and is the best place for a quieter drink with friends. The Roots is a nice Rasta-styled bar where you'd expect Thamel's hip-hop kids to hang out. The bar scene is unique, but it can't help falling into the strange trap no city with bars can escape—the Irish bar. Paddy Foley's Irish bar is very large, but unfortunately no one ever seems to be there.

The food in Thamel, thankfully, is loads more interesting than, well, meat, potatoes and cabbage. Most restaurants share the same menu—and kitchen, we believe—that offers reliable, if unadventurous, ChineseIndianContinentalBreakfast, but there are some mouthwatering exceptions. The Northfield Café is a good place for contemporary southwestern-American food. There are other old standbys like Third Eye, Alice's, a veggie place, and KC's, the oldest restaurant in the area, which



does steaks and such carnivores' delights. Yin Yang, one of the two best Thai places here, is actually a Freak Street phenomenon that moved to Thamel and recently slicked itself up considerably. The other is Krua Thai, whose Thai chef used to work at a vastly popular Darbar Marg joint, but decided to take a walk on the wild side. There's a preponderance of lip-smacking Italian places, like La Dolce Vita and Casa della Pasta. The best Nepali food is at Thakali Bhanchaghar—a delicious fixed-price-all-you-can-eat Thakali lunch/dinner that makes people sob with joy at the end of the month.

Food is also at the forefront of a movement we call "the new Thamel". It's slightly more slick places with a late-90s sensibility, like the pizza and pasta Fire and Ice, the two new coffee shops, Himalayan Java and Himalatte, which are a nice complement to the Japanese coffee shop, Chikusa, and the all-American Over the Rainbow, opposite Pilgrims, which does the best



soups and sandwiches in the city. There's also Jatra, at the Satghumti end of Thamel, which is like a mini-Thamel, with Internet facilities, a handicrafts shop, a reading room, and a bar that serves drool-inducing finger-food, all in a lovely old building.

There are over 200 dining and drinking establishments in one sq km here, and competition is intense, with room for freebies—there's free tequila at Walter's Botega, but the kids in ponchos and sombreros who accost you on street corners are surreal enough to make you think maybe you've already had enough. Bookstores buy back books you've bought from them for half what you paid. Bakeries offer 50 percent off after 7 pm, and there are some wicked one-for-one happy hour deals. Himalayan Encounter, a very hip tour agency, even offers slide shows on adventure travel with free drinks!

Thamel is packed weekend nights and that's how many of us know it, but there are so many reasons to just

spend a day there, walking around. The colours, the hustlers, the dealers, the merchandise and food and drink, and the only real nightlife in otherwise quiet Kathmandu. Off-season, young Nepalis still keep coming. The cosmopolitan environment gives everybody space—nothing stands out, nothing seems out of place and the sheer variety is mind-boggling. That could be why increasingly more Nepalis favour Thamel than New Road or Darbar Marg.

Many things are not what they seem here, and many things simmer under the surface, waiting to be discovered, or hit you in the face. And, really, who knows how long it will last—some say Thamel is facing saturation. Freak Street, once so vibrant and colourful, died, and the fluid nature of tourism might lead Thamel to a similar destiny. With the slow rise of Baudha, or the revival of Freak Street, things are uncertain. ♦

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"Do you want hash? Do you exchange dollars?" asks a handsome young man detaching himself from the crowd. And what a crowd: tall blonde men in shorts, Mediterranean men in loose embroidered shirts and earrings and little else. Fat foreign girls bursting out of jeans, always bra-less. Overpainted women hung with chain jewellery playing hard at being gypsies, college girls in Mother-Hubbards, men in cloaks of embroidered velvet. Roguishly good looking Nepalis

who have at least a smattering of several languages. Sturdy Tibetans and people one would find it difficult to put a label on. They fill the narrow street, gesticulating in groups or examining some openly displayed garments in a "Buy and Exchange" shop. And, if you are lucky, someone as my kind of Kathmandu as Margot or Ira Cohen, the poet and his unfailingly, dramatically beautiful artist wife, Petra, will cut an unforgettable

swathe through Freak Street trailing acolytes.

Matching the milieu are the shops and restaurants in the street, many with imported names which in Kathmandu have gone slumming: The Hungry I, Mona Lisa, Don't Pass Me By, Golden Dragon, and August Moon. They are all dim but glowing and shaken with music. Shops are festooned with gaudy clothes that hang from first and second floor windows to the street. You can be embroidered within minutes from an exotic range of designs and be smothered in trinkets from shops that appear to offer more than their silver and turquoise and coral.

In my memory, Freak Street is raffishly new. I can remember when a wing of the old palace, remarkable for its carved windows lingered halfway down the street and obviously lost its battle to survive against the scramble of changing time. It became the Soho or Greenwich village of Kathmandu.

But now, relentlessly newer structures of concrete are edging out mud brick walls and timber and tiles, and Freak Street is in danger of becoming just another shopping centre.

At the palace end of the street, the eighteenth century Basantapur Tower raised by the Gorkha conqueror, Prithvi Narayan Shah,

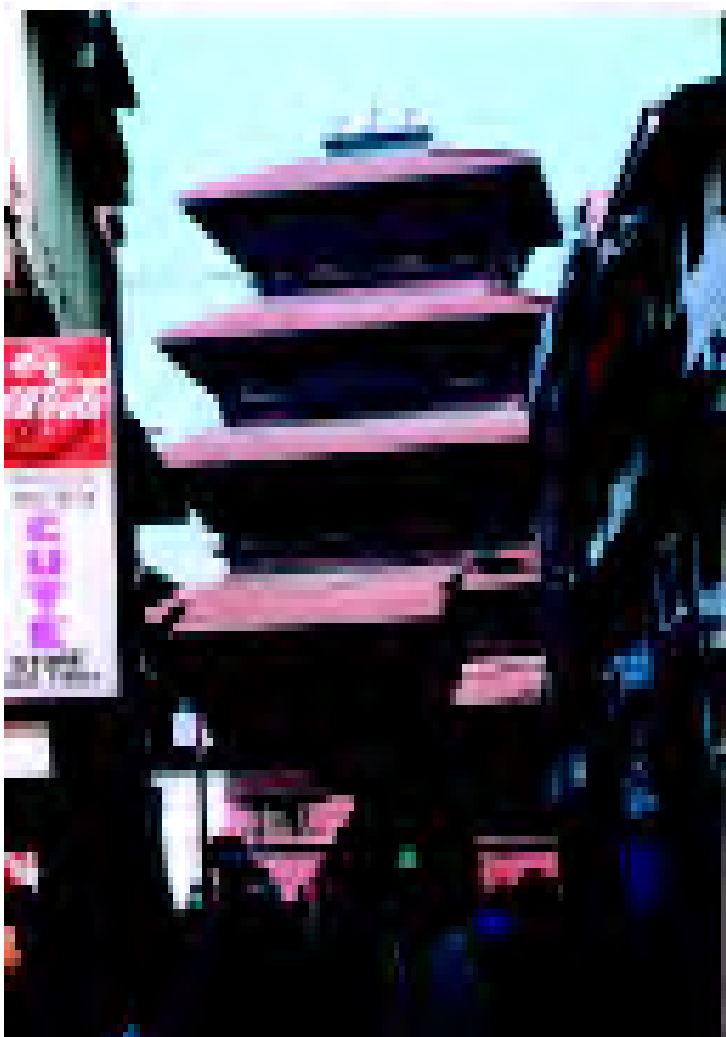
But now, relentlessly newer structures of concrete are edging out mud brick walls and timber and tiles, and Freak Street is in danger of becoming just another shopping center



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stands nine-storey proud. To this first Gorkha king of all Nepal is attributed the saying that foreigners come as missionaries, then to trade and finally with arms. I wonder what he would make of the foreign crowd in Freak Street. They come in search of personal Nirvana, Dharma bums and shoestring sadhus, plain romantics and passing converts. Like a friend of mine from a fashionable resort in Europe, who came elegantly attired, got run through by the relentless passion of Kathmandu, changed into homespun, found herself a Guru and for months drifted about on a smile and then went buoyantly back to renounce her very profitable business, her friends, her family and return to ecstasy.

There is the Yin and Yang in the shadow of the Basantapur Tower where on cleverly devised, carpeted levels and in an atmosphere of vermilion, and gilded gloom, seekers after bliss drift through for before-dinner beers, meals and after-dinner joints. And even if the service has disappeared like smoke, to sleep or join a festival and one remains unserved, the atmosphere is more than filling.



MIN BAIRACHARYA

At the tattier end of Freak Street was the small five-and-a-half table, Lost Horizon, run by Tibetan friends. They shopped and cooked and served and slept at night on the tables. And through the windows of the restaurants four timeless Buddhas set into a stupa gazed with

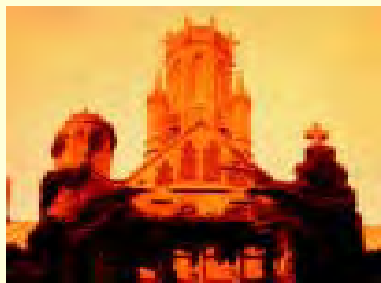
all-seeing eyes as customer after customer ate buffalo chow-mein or buff-steaks or pulled on blue clouds of instant Nirvana. ♦

Excerpted with permission from My Kind of Kathmandu, Harper Collins, 1994.

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Stealing culture with dodgy didges

SANJIVA WIJESINHA IN MELBOURNE

Some have compared its sound to that of a mating bullfrog. But to most people who hear it, the haunting sounds of the didgeridoo evoke the powerful spiritual music of an ancient race—the Aboriginal people of Australia. “At times,” says Aboriginal musician Kelly McGuinness, “it sounds like a deep pipe organ note being played continuously, at others like a drum beaten in three-four time.”

The didgeridoo, a wind instrument, is believed to have originated in northern Australia, in the regions around what are now known as Cairns and Arnhem Land, before being carried along ancient trading routes to other parts of the country. Crafted out of the length of hollowed stem 1.2 to 1.5 metres long and about five centimetres in internal diameter, the didgeridoo—or *Yiddaki* as Aboriginals call it—has been part of Australia’s indigenous culture for thousands of years.

It may be one of the oldest known musical instruments, but the world outside came across so-called ‘didge music’ only in 1963, with Australian entertainer Rolf Harris’ 1963 hit *Tie me kangaroo down, sport*. More recently, a host of musicians from British pop singer Kate Bush to Aboriginal singer Yothu Yindi have used it. Its strange and mysterious tones set the atmosphere at the opening ceremony of the Sydney

Australia’s aboriginal people are upset that the didgeridoo is being mass-produced without any consideration for their traditions and interests.

Olympics last year.

But as worldwide sales of didgeridoos skyrocket—over 6,000 websites in a variety of European languages are devoted to this instrument, and in Germany alone there are over 25,000 licensed sales agents—complaints have grown that this rapid commercialisation is harming Aboriginal traditions and interests.

The didgeridoo is traditionally made from the stem of the Malee tree, which is a Eucalyptus variant, with many stems arising from a single underground tuber. However, only stems that have been naturally hollowed out by termites are used. A strict licensing system, put in place by the department of Conservation and Land Management, allows only one stem to be cut from any one Malee tree. The stem must be tested with a hand drill for hollowness before being cut.

Fashioning such instruments in the traditional manner is still the preferred way of the Aboriginal people. “However,” says musician McGuinness, “ever since whitefellas came to Australia they have been trying to make imitation didgeridoos.”

“Non-indigenous producers clear large areas of forest with

chainsaws and then hollow out didgeridoos from solid timber,” says John Armitage of Aberdeenshire in Scotland, who imports didgeridoos for sale in Britain. Shiny, lightweight and easy to carry didgeridoos are made from PVC pipes as far from Australia as Pennsylvania and California in the United States. They are offered for sale cheap on the Internet, undercutting the hand-painted traditional versions.

The latest version is the ‘sliding didge’ made of PVC—much like a trombone, so the player can blow out a variety of pitches. Admittedly these ‘dodgy didges’ have a place. Says Kutcha Edwards, lead singer of the Aboriginal music group Blackfire, “I myself have used a sliding didge to obtain different sounds, because it is easier than carrying five or six separate instruments, each capable of producing only one pitch.” “They are okay for recording—but not for traditional ceremonies. That would be like playing in the symphony orchestra with a violin made of cheap plastic!” he adds.

But many Aboriginal arts groups have strongly criticised manufacturers and importers of such imitation didgeridoos, calling for

international copyright licensing of these cultural instruments. “We cannot cope with the cheap didges that are flooding the market out there,” says Kim Jelley, owner of Indigenous Creations, a six-year-old didgeridoo company that works with some 300 Aboriginal artists in the Northern Territory.

“Imitation didgeridoos are being produced by the thousands in Australia and even Indonesia, and being passed off as genuine Aboriginal handicrafts,” adds Marie Munkara of the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists. Now, the National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association (NIAAA) is introducing authenticity labels. Under new guidelines, artistes must prove their Aboriginality before being allowed to register as indigenous artistes and place bar-coded authenticity labels on their products.

“Our label ensures that the money returns to indigenous people,” says Kevin Francis, executive officer of NIAAA. “The didgeridoo doesn’t come from the world at large—it comes from Australia,” Munkara says. “If we have our way, people will have to ask us traditional owners for permission to manufacture them—



and go into licensing agreements to manufacture didgeridoos.”

Kelly McGuinness adds, “You can take the didge out of Australia, but you cannot take Australia out of the didgeridoo. If you were

buying a sitar, for example, surely you would want a genuine one made in India and not in some sweatshop overseas. “Should it not be the same for the didgeridoo?” ♦ (Gemini)

Collateral damage

REEM HADDAD IN BEIRUT

Fifteen years after their daughter was killed in the United States air raid over Libya, Bassam and Sanyia el-Ghussein continue in their attempts to sue the US government. The Lebanese couple was living in Tripoli in 1986 when US fighter planes bombed the Libyan capital, killing 18-year-old Raafat el-Ghussein among 55 people.

The Lockerbie trial, which ended January with the conviction of a Libyan government agent, has only intensified the family’s need to also find a “closure” to their pain—as did the families of those who died when PanAm Flight 103 exploded and crashed over Lockerbie, Scotland, on 21 December 1988. The PanAm explosion allegedly occurred in retaliation for the US bombing of Libya two years before. “If victims’ families have the right to justice for the murder of their loved ones, so do I” said Bassam el-Ghussein. The difference between them and us is that we know for certain who the guilty ones are and they don’t.”

For the past 15 years, the family has been trying to take the US government to court. Half a dozen lawyers have been hired but none have been successful in arranging a trial. “I want an admission from the US government that they killed my daughter,” el-Ghussein said. “Just a simple admission. Or is it that the US government has a license to kill?”

On 14 April 1986, 18 US F-111 fighter planes left a military airport base in Britain and made their way to Libya in an operation dubbed ‘Eldorado Canyon’. Their aim was



Libyan protests over the Lockerbie ruling

The conviction in the Lockerbie case has met victims’ families’ demands, but a Libyan family cannot even convince courts to hear their case.

to hit ‘terrorist’ targets in Tripoli. Colonel Arnold Franklin Jr., commander of 493 Tactical Fighter Squadron stationed in Lakenheath, Britain, would later say that his mission was to “maximise visual damage and to demonstrate resolve against terrorism.”

Believing that Libya was the mastermind behind several attacks, including a West Berlin discotheque bombing on 5 April 1986, then US president Ronald Reagan ordered the bombing of military sites in Libya. The Pentagon said that the bombs caused “collateral damage”—military-speak for civilians wounded and dead.

In 1989 Ramsey Clark, a former US attorney general, filed a lawsuit in Washington DC on behalf of the families of the victims. The suit was against Reagan and also named Britain and then PM Margaret Thatcher as defendants for allowing US bombers to use British air bases.

A US federal court, however, ordered that Clark be fined for filing what it called a “frivolous” suit.

“They think our daughter’s death was ‘frivolous,’” el-Ghussein said in anger. The family has since then appealed to many human rights groups and lawyers, both in the US and Britain. Their case has been repeatedly rejected.

“We have the proof that they have killed innocent people,” el-Ghussein said. The family is demanding answers: why was their home, in an exclusive neighbourhood with a public garden on one side and the French Embassy on the other, targeted?

A few weeks ago, they sought to file a suit in Britain in the name of their sole surviving daughter, 22-year-old Kinda. As a British citizen, the family thought she would have better luck. But British lawyers informed the family that if they lost the case, Kinda would have to pay all the court fees. The family

dropped the UK suit.

But it is still haunted by the one night 15 years ago. Raafat had been visiting her parents for the Easter holidays in April 1986. The family had moved during the Lebanese civil war to Tripoli, where Bassam el-Ghussein worked as a petroleum engineer.

Raafat had been sent off to Britain to study at Marymount International, a boarding school for girls. Talented in the arts, she was later accepted at London’s Heatherly School of Arts and had just begun her first term. On 14 April 1986, Raafat chose to sleep in the family’s television room where a built-in humidifier would relieve her hay fever symptoms. At 11.30 pm, her mother came in to give her some allergy medicine.

With warmth that Sanyia el-Ghussein still cannot forget, Raafat told her mother how grateful she was to her parents for insisting on sending her to Britain for her studies. Bidding her daughter good night, Sanyia went to join her husband, to find that seven-year-old Kinda had fallen asleep next to him. Sanyia went off to sleep in the girls’ bedroom. She woke to the sound of her husband’s voice yelling out to the family. He couldn’t see Kinda, he told her, but he could hear and feel her nearby. Both were pinned down by the rubble.

Sanyia went out for help, walking the deserted streets until she found a man who accompanied her back. Her husband and Kinda were pulled out first. It was hours before they could get to Raafat. “She looked like she was still sleeping,” Sanyia said. “There was just a bump on the side of her head.”

Fifteen years have passed since and the memories of Raafat have not been laid to rest. ♦ (Gemini)

MAD SOW

Mass slaughter of thousands of pigs and cattle on eight farms across parts of Britain has begun in a bid to wipe out foot-and-mouth disease, as supermarkets appealed to shoppers not to indulge in panic buying for meat.

The pig slaughter—likely to run to thousands of animals—began on the six confirmed outbreak sites and two “dangerous contacts”, veterinary officials said.

The “contact” farms, one near the confirmed outbreak in Heddon-on-the-Wall, Northumberland, and one in north Kent, have not been confirmed as having the disease.

Chief veterinary officer Jim Scudamore said there had been no further confirmed outbreaks of the disease, and described it as “a hopeful sign”. He said the slaughter of pigs was also taking place at the two dangerous contact sites because it was safer to begin the cull without waiting to learn if the pigs had been infected. The second site, in north Kent, had “direct and close links” to one of the farms in the Essex cluster and slaughter had begun there as a precautionary measure.

Agriculture minister Nick Brown said supermarkets across Britain had not reported panic buying after the ban on the movement of livestock within Britain. The seven-day ban had triggered fears of meat shortages and panic buying and the minister urged shoppers to remain calm. He said vets were being drafted in from across the country to help track the origin of the outbreak, which was still believed to be the Heddon-on-the-Wall farm. Scudamore said the farm had been inspected by veterinary officials on January 24 but said he was satisfied they had found no sign of the disease. Officials have written to veterinary practices across Britain asking for help in tracking the disease.

He said similar measures had been used in the 1967 outbreak and added that the international community had also offered assistance, with vets from countries including New Zealand likely to be involved in exterminating the outbreak. Brown said this weekend was a “crucial time” in the progress of the outbreak. He said: “We know that events can develop very quickly and that this is the crucial time. Because of the incubation period of this type of foot-and-mouth disease we would expect to be receiving further reports from farmers now if it had spread, and so far there are no other reports.” He said MAFF officials would be considering reports that pigswill could have been involved in triggering the outbreak. (ITN)



The coffin returns



MICHAEL A BENGWAYAN IN MANILA

When Mariana Simbutan came home on the evening of 2 October last year no joyous welcome from family and friends greeted her at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport. Instead, shocked and grief-stricken family members received a cheap makeshift coffin creaking under the weight of her lifeless body.

Simbutan died mysteriously in Tripoli, Libya, where she worked as a domestic maid. Her employer claimed she had committed suicide. An autopsy examination in the Philippines of Simbutan's body showed long scars on her chest. Some of her internal organs were missing. Her relatives suspect her body parts were stolen and used to transplant on an unknown beneficiary.

Growing domestic unemployment and huge remittances sent back by migrant workers have led successive governments to encourage Filipinos to go abroad. "But for how long will the state sacrifice its labourers for money?" asks GABRIELA, a Manila-based women's human rights group.

Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) records show

An alarming number of Filipino overseas workers are returned home dead under unknown and mysterious circumstances.

that some 1,224 overseas Filipino workers have been sent back home dead in the past five years. All died either under unknown or mysterious circumstances or for unsubstantiated reasons. The figures are rising every year. Socorro Ballesteros of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) says that an average of six bodies of Filipinos arrive at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport every day. Normally, four of them are women. In November 2000, a Congressional hearing was convened to inquire into the issue. It was revealed that in 1996 alone at least 150 deaths occurred under suspicious circumstances.

The body of Felicidad Tiladan, a 31-year-old single mother who worked in Taiwan, came home in a coffin on 14 November 2000. It bore bruises and deep cuts. The family she worked for reported she committed suicide by jumping off a speeding vehicle. But that did not explain the knife cuts. An autopsy, conducted at the request of her

relatives, found that some of her organs were missing.

The gory trail goes back to 1997, when the body of Ely Rose Miguel — also returned from Taiwan and claimed to be a suicide case — was autopsied and found to be without the heart. Investigations initiated by Guerrero Cirilo, then Philippine labour attaché in Taiwan and now labour director of DOLE, have led the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation to suspect a Taiwanese racket in human organ piracy. However, critics say the Philippine government, while eager to benefit from remittances by overseas workers, is slow when it comes to pursuing these cases. Simbutan, Tiladan and Miguel are in a long list of cases that remain unsolved.

Six million overseas contract workers sent home \$8 billion through the banking system in 1999 — and the figure does not take into account substantial amounts of cash sent informally

through friends and relatives. Still, these workers do not get adequate attention or assistance from the government once they meet serious problems abroad.

According to DOLE, an astonishing 1,800 Filipinos leave their country everyday for jobs abroad. Their top destination is the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, followed by Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Taiwan. Their remittances have been the country's top dollar earner since the early 1980s, outpacing exports by 15 per cent in the last four years and large enough to close the widening trade gap which in 1996 had swollen to \$10 billion.

The process was hastened by the sustained and rapid economic development of the East and South-East Asian countries, according to Dr Stuart Rosewarne, author of *The Globalisation and Liberalisation of Asian Labour Markets*. Rosewarne, of the University of Sydney, also says governments found overseas work a convenient way to deal with the Philippine's domestic unemployment problem.

None of this will lessen the anger and distress of the families of workers who died abroad. Nobody, charges GABRIELA, is around to answer their questions — least of all apathetic government officials who regard these cases as an embarrassment to their grand economic plans. ♦ (Gemini)

Near breaking point

NADEEM YAQUB IN PESHAWAR

Poorly-clad, barefoot children are shivering in sub-zero temperatures, people are begging for food and fresh graves are being dug every day as politics and nature create a serious humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Two years of drought, a severe winter and fresh fighting between the Taliban rulers of Kabul and the forces of the opposition Northern Alliance, have driven tens of thousands of Afghans out of their mainly rural homes in the past year. Many have taken shelter in UN run camps for internally displaced people in Afghanistan and more than 170,000 Afghans have crossed the border into Pakistan in the last six months — the biggest Afghan refugee influx into Pakistan in a decade.

Media reports of the crisis are still to move the world into stepping up assistance to Afghanistan, despite pleas from UN and international relief agencies. Driven by domestic economic and political compulsions, Afghanistan's neighbours are even shutting their doors on fresh refugees. Matters have not been helped by the political confrontation between the UN Security Council and the Taliban, which faces UN sanctions.

Drought kept the peasants from planting their crop. Near famine conditions in the past year then forced them to eat even the seed kept aside for sowing the new crop. With nothing to eat at home, some 80,000 Afghans have poured into seven camps for internally displaced people, in and around the western Afghanistan city of Herat in the past six months. Fleeing the fighting in the north between the Taliban and Northern Alliance,



Afghan refugees at the Jalozaï refugee camp near Peshawar.

Nature and politics worsen a serious humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

another 10,000 Afghans have camped near the country's border with Tajikistan.

As if hunger and war were not enough, heavy snow in and around Herat mid-January and early February, made the battle for survival even tougher for those living in the tents and mud-houses that make up the shelter camps. After enduring two decades of fighting, first against the occupying Soviet army and then among themselves, Afghans are now reported to be nearing breaking point.

Leading Pakistani, Peshawar-based journalist Rahimullah Yusufzai who visited the Herat camps in mid-February, said he was shown graves of those who could not survive the ordeal. Raz Mohammad, a Taliban official in charge of the Refugees and Martyrs Welfare Department, was reported saying mid-February that more than 500 people, mainly children, have died due to cold in the camps. However, people in the Maslakh Camp in Herat told journalists that the number of deaths in their camp alone could be as high as 800. The

condition of those who crossed the border is hardly better.

Toward the end of last year and earlier this year, thousands of Afghans arrived at the makeshift Jalozaï refugee camp, some 30 km east of Peshawar, the capital city of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Yusuf Hassan, regional spokesman of UNHCR, in a 22 February statement: "The Afghans fled to Pakistan to escape the twin scourges of war and drought. Weakened by hunger and diseases, they need urgent help. Unless prompt assistance is provided, Jalozaï may turn into a death camp," the statement said. The UN agency has allocated \$4 million to help those living in Jalozaï, he said. "We thought we will be better off in Pakistan," said Najeeba Bibi, an Afghan at the Jalozaï camp. She has a sick child, but the three health clinics in Jalozaï are unable to treat the crowd of patients they get everyday. According to Mazhar Khan, a doctor in one of the clinics, some 300 patients are treated daily in one of the clinics. "Every refugee family

has brought an ill adult and a minor," he said. Technically, the Afghans at Jalozaï cannot even be called refugees because they have not yet been registered.

Provincial authorities are not listening to the UN agency's plea for a new camp for the Afghan refugees. Naeem Khan, NWFP commissioner for Afghan refugees, said: "We do not want to register more refugees because once they are registered, we have to provide them space, food and other facilities. It costs a huge amount of money to set up a new camp," he said. The UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian affairs, Kenzo Oshima, who visited the Afghan camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan mid-February, has appealed for more international help. "What I witnessed at Jalozaï was a sea of refugees living in unbelievable misery. There is a big tragedy indeed that cries out for some kind of help," he was quoted as saying. Oshima said about a million people are threatened by famine in Afghanistan and desperately in need of large-scale aid, which should not be delayed. The UN official estimated that more than 170,000 Afghans had crossed over into Pakistan.

United Nations officials expect the situation to worsen. However, Pakistan is insistent that it can no longer continue to look after Afghan refugees. The military regime in Islamabad has decided to refuse entry to new Afghan refugees. Late February, NWFP authorities ordered 100,000 Afghan refugees living in Nasirbagh Camp, one of the oldest Afghan refugee camps in Peshawar, to vacate the area by 31 July. No alternative site has been provided. "It is time they leave," said a government official. ♦ (IPS)

Borneo burning

Over 270 people were confirmed dead after a week of ethnic clashes between locals and immigrants in the Indonesian half of the island of Borneo. One journalist from the migrant community said last week that he had heard the true figure could be more than 700. Police strongly disputed this.

Mobs of Dayaks, the indigenous people, armed with swords and machetes, burned houses, shops and hotels during the day in the town of Sampit, where the fighting is concentrated. More dead were also reported in other towns.

About 15,000 people, mostly migrants from the small island of Madura off the northeast coast of Java, were seeking refuge at police and government offices in Sampit, in central Kalimantan province. They are likely to be evacuated on warships sent from Java. Extra police and soldiers are also on their way.

The Dayaks say the Madurans — many of whom arrived more than 30 years ago under Indonesia's programme to resettle people from densely populated areas — are unduly aggressive and do not respect local customs. The Madurans say the Dayaks are lazy and are jealous that the migrants control much of the economy. A doctor at the hospital in Sampit said last night: "We've received more than 30 [bodies] today and many of them are missing limbs, the torsos are slashed and skulls battered," he said. Local media reported that more than 20 had been decapitated and Dayaks were seen parading the severed heads round the town.

"In many areas of the town the sky has turned black today with the smoke from all the burning buildings," said Achmad Badui, a Maduran journalist sheltering at a government office. "A group of community leaders has said that more than 700 Madurese have been killed last week." The unrest erupted early last week after a group of Dayaks attacked a housing complex and killed five Madurans. The Madurans launched revenge attacks and the situation deteriorated. Three men, two of them government officials, are under arrest accused of inciting the initial attack. (Guardian)



Who advised His Majesty?

Saptahik Bimarsha, 23 February



ALL PICS: MIN. BAIRACHARYA

"Who gave His Majesty this advice?" is the question being asked everywhere. The question concerns the Citizens Bill, which the lower house of parliament passed almost 8 months ago. Then, four months ago, the speaker of the Lower House certified that this Act was in accordance with the Constitution and the bill was sent to the king for his assent after which it would become a law of the land. His Majesty, it seems, had doubts "whether the Bill sent to him for his assent was in accordance with the Constitution or not". He has now asked the Supreme Court for its suggestions and recommendations.

The Supreme Court, on receiving the letter from the king, got working and Chief Justice Keshab Prasad Upadhaya has fixed 14 March as the date when hearings will commence. The chief justice has proclaimed that a total of six members, in two groups of three, will help in carrying out discussions and has requested people to get involved in this work immediately.

The apex court cannot go against the Constitution and whatever recommendations it makes to the king will in no way affect the said bill or in any way affect the position and stand taken by the king. Act 88, Clause 5 of the Constitution states: "If His Majesty wants the opinion or recommendations, concerning some act, article or clause of the constitution or some difficult legal matter, then the Supreme Court if asked can provide answers, opinions or recommendations to His Majesty."

It is under this very clause that the king has been seeking the opinion of the Supreme Court time and again. This is where constitutional experts differ. They say that once a bill has been passed by parliament, the king cannot ask the Supreme Court for its opinion. If the king is in disagreement with a particular bill passed by parliament and sent to him for his assent, he can return the bill within a month of receiving it and ask parliament to take a second look at it. Since this is a Finance Bill, the king cannot do that.

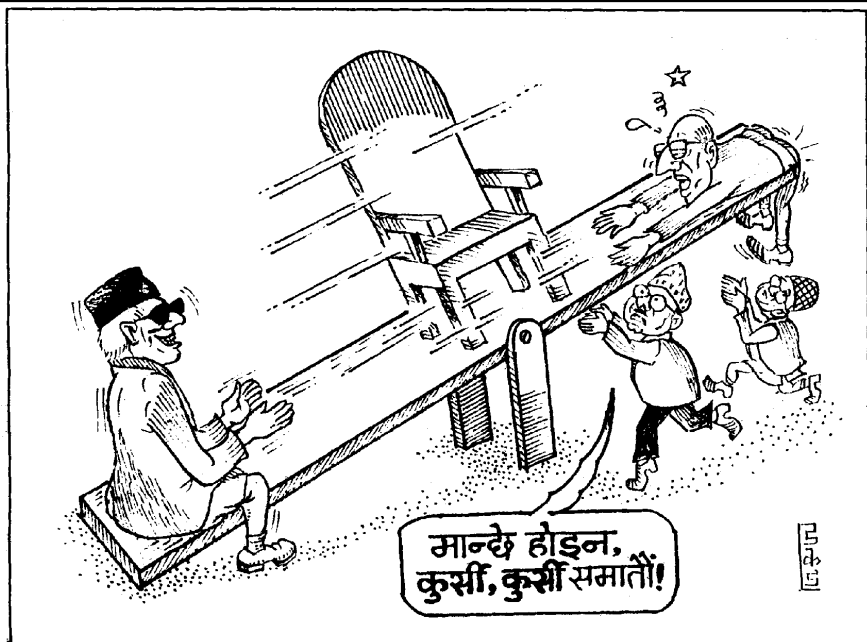
The Court can only give its opinion on the bill, it cannot give a decision. The Constitution does not give the king the right to change a bill. A Bill becomes an Act only after the king has signed it and then those parts that contradict the Constitution are deleted. Therefore, if the Court now gives the verdict that the citizenship bill contradicts the constitution, what is His Majesty going to do? Will he sign it after getting such an opinion? He does not have the right to reject it and neither can he ignore it. This will put more pressure on him.

At this point, some people point to Act 55 Clause 3 of the Constitution. This clause states: "His Majesty can send to both or any one house of parliament his message. As soon as that particular house receives His Majesty's message, it shall immediately get together and give its opinion to His Majesty on the issue His Majesty has referred to in his message." Constitutional experts differ on this issue as well. They state that this clause cannot be used when such issues (like the Citizenship Bill) are being referred to. This clause can only be used when parliament or any one of the two houses of parliament is not discussing an important issue and His Majesty thinks that the house should take it up. Parliament has not neglected the bill in question and it has been discussed at great length. It has been passed by the Lower House, discussed by the Upper House and sent back. It was then discussed again in the Lower House and then only had it been sent to His Majesty for his signature. Therefore Act 54 Clause 3 cannot be used in this case and using it will only contradict the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The possibility of re-elections is out of the question. The Nepali Congress has a majority, and can govern for five years. Re-elections will be the downfall of the Congress and there's no way we'll let that happen.

—Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai in an interview concerning Prime Minister G.P. Koirala's troubles with governance. **Punrajagaran**, 27 February Tuesday



"The chair! Grab the chair, not the man"

पुनराजगरण *Punrajagaran, Weekly, 27 February 2001*

Gas companies cry foul

Tarun, 19 February

It appears that the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) has stopped following the directives issued to it by the concerned ministry. The Ministry of Supplies had sent a letter to the NOC stating that besides the import and distribution of petroleum products and aviation fuel, private parties could now import and distribute cooking gas (LPG). The government, it said, would fix the basic price and the private firms could price their product only 5 percent above or below the price fixed by the government. However, last week, the managing committee of the NOC decided that it too would enter the LPG market and start distributing cooking gas.

It has long been rumoured that NOC officials receive hefty commissions from owners of gas-run vehicles and big hotels, and that large



commissions are also collected while distributing quotas to the different gas refuelling companies. The NOC is now constructing its own refuelling stations and it is expected that NOC officials will get a lot of commissions from contractors who are building these refuelling stations. According to sources, the NOC is building storage tanks and refuelling plants in Janakpur and Dang. In Janakpur, the NOC is going to take over land from the Tobacco Development Authority and in Dang it has called for tenders from people wanting to sell their land.

According to the acting director of the NOC, Madan Raj Sharma, the corporation is going to provide LPG in different cylinders to big hotels and gas vehicles. For domestic users, it will continue to use the same cylinders that are currently in use. If the NOC gets into the business of supplying LPG, then the 14 companies that are currently in the market are all going to close down. It has been rumoured that these 14 companies are not going to supply gas in the future and are planning to go on strike. If this happens consumers will suffer again.

Power corruption

Drishya, 20 February

The Nepal Electricity Authority, it seems, is always at the centre of some corruption scandal or other. The latest concerns the buying of 50,000 electric metres. According to our reporter, the NEA had called for a tender for the supply of the metres some time ago. Thirteen companies responded and filed tenders.

According to sources, a Chinese company, Hyukhai, quoted the least bid amount. It has now been learnt that pressure was applied from the 'top' at the NEA and the technical evaluation team of the NEA disqualified Hyukhai's tender. The technical committee also disqualified nine other companies that had filed tenders, leaving only four companies in the fray for the next round of the

selection process.

There are two evaluating committees in the NEA—one for technical evaluation and the other for financial evaluation. If the NEA does not want to be summoned by



the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), it should award the contract to Hyukhai, which quoted the least amount. But it seems that the NEA does not care for the CIAA or the PAC. Hyukhai had quoted \$8.68 per metre, but the Shanghai Electrical Company, another Chinese company, which quoted the highest bid at \$14.4 per metre, was chosen instead. Even on the issue of buying a small item like an electric metre there is corruption in the NEA to the tune of Rs 20 million.

Public sector undertakers

Drishya, 20 February

The government had formed a high level team to look into the functioning of the public sector undertakings (PSUs) and to recommend ways and means in which they could be strengthened and made more profitable. The recommendations were to be presented by 17 October 2000. The team had a meeting on 14 February and it was here that problems arose. Some members of the team that drew up the report have raised objections to the report prepared. The objecting members are known to be those representing labour unions.

The recommendations are:

- All PSUs should be gradually privatised.
- While appointing heads of PSUs, the selection body should be neutral and well qualified. Three persons well qualified from within or outside the PSU should be short-listed for the post and interviewed before being appointed.
- The head should be appointed on the basis of his qualification and capabilities and not on the basis of his political affiliation. He should be familiar with the working of the PSU and should have worked in a similar capacity before.
- Appointments and promotions should be made by an independent and separate body to be formed.
- A high-level body should be formed to provide guidance, exert control and to direct the working of PSUs.
- The work and functioning of PSUs should be spelt out clearly, management should be leased out, and the government should act as a controlling body only and not be involved in the day-to-day functioning of the company.
- Although there are unions in essential services organisations like aviation, water supply, electricity, banking and fuel supply, it should be made clear to the workers that they will not be allowed to go on strike nor disrupt work in any way. In fact, strikes should be banned in organisations that produce essential commodities or provide such services.
- If workers perform well they should be rewarded and if they function

poorly they should be punished.

- Excess labour must be laid off or removed.
- Leakage must be controlled.
- A government agency must be formed to provide control and guidance to PSUs.
- If annual financial statements and papers are not properly made or kept, action has to be taken against the PSU head and the chief of the financial section of that PSU.
- The government must help these PSUs become strong to survive in the open market system.

Maoists kick out VDC secretaries

Deskhant Saptahik, 25 February

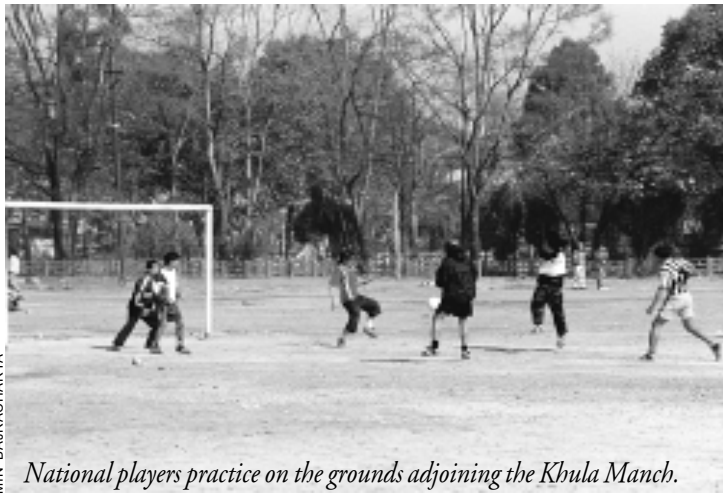
Some time ago, the Local Development Ministry passed a directive stating that village development committee (VDC) secretaries should not be transferred to another place or department. They can only be transferred if there is a vacancy in some other place. Immediately after the government order went out, the Maoists got moving and have now started chasing VDC secretaries away from areas where the Maoists are powerful. Since these secretaries are representatives of the government, the Maoists are targeting them. In the Maoist areas of Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan and Gorkha, these secretaries suspected by Maoists of being government agents and informers are being threatened and forced to leave the districts. Secretaries who have been chased from the districts have all converged at the concerned ministry in the hope that some one will listen to them and get them transferred to a district or village where the Maoists are not powerful.

According to the ministry, there are almost a hundred villages without secretaries at present. There are more than 300 secretaries who have come to the ministry to get themselves transferred. There is no problem in getting these 300 people transferred, but some one else will have to be sent to the places vacated by them. Otherwise, a serious problem will be created in the ministry. According to the local development secretary, Uday Raj Soti, many VDC secretaries have already accepted letters stating that they will not be transferred to another place or department. This directive incidentally, is not applicable to female secretaries. Female secretaries will be given a place or department transfer within a month of placing their request.

One method of filling these vacant places is through new recruitment, but the Public Service Commission is not admitting any new people at the moment. On the other hand, the ministry has passed a policy of transferring people only if there is a replacement available. This again does not solve the current problem. These secretaries complain and say, "The Maoists suspect us of being spies and government agents, they chase us away. We cannot enter the villages and it is difficult to carry papers and money with us. Otherwise, we will be forced to stay in the district headquarters and carry out our work from there."

This is a serious blow to the government, but it has remained silent so far and not done anything. The Maoists are carrying on with their work, holding public meetings regularly and forming their own government, but the government has not been able to counter this in any way. If the armed police force act is not passed soon, the government is going to

Fouling football



MIN BAJRACHARYA

National players practice on the grounds adjoining the Khula Manch.

MUKUL HUMUGAIN

Six months of media reports over the shameful and disgusting All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) controversy, and the problem is far from solved. It took a new twist on 20 February after national soccer players announced that they would not take part in any international tournament until the present crisis is solved. And even if they wanted to, there's no governing authority that will let them. The players have called for the unification of the both the ANFA factions.

Critics accuse the players of worsening matters for both factions and fuelling a problem that has tarnished the nation's footballing image. But the truth of the matter is that the players' statement has only shown how deep-rooted problems within the nation's leading sports association are. National players issued this statement at a press conference after both the ANFA factions summoned them to join the training camp for the selection of the team for the World Cup qualifiers to be held in April this year. Earlier, Nepal was denied the chance of hosting the preliminaries due to the very same controversy.

With only one month left for the Asian Group 6 World Cup qualifying matches, Nepal's participation is in serious doubt. So far, players have refused to join the training camps of either ANFA faction. Instead, they have started their own practice sessions on the grounds adjoining the Open Theatre (*Khula Manch*) at Tundikhel. More than two dozen national soccer players have been practicing there for the last one week. "We're forced to practice on our own as both factions of the ANFA are still

not keen on resolving the matter," says Upendra Man Singh, national team captain. "We are in a dilemma over which side to join," he added.

Players say they will not side with either of the associations until the problem is solved. Which can only



Upendra Man Singh

MIN BAJRACHARYA

mean one thing: unification of ANFA. The ever-widening rift within the ANFA has forced them to take this decision, they say. Bal Gopal Maharjan, vice-captain of the national team says: "The World Football's governing body, FIFA, has recognised one association whereas NSC recognises another." He said that although they will play football at the national level as per the contract with their respective clubs, they have decided not to participate in international level football until the sports ministry solves the present controversy.

So far, both ANFA factions have

Nepali football is at a stalemate. National players refuse to budge until the ANFA controversy is over, NSC won't recognise Thapa, and FIFA and AFC won't even consider Geeta Rana.

refused to budge and have been staking their claim to legitimacy in order to take the team for the qualifiers. However, players seem adamant about their decision not to play until the end of the controversy. It is not clear what the future strategy of either faction will be, although it is highly unlikely the two warring factions will unite considering the ego problems between the two. At present, Thapa has a slight advantage due to the support and recognition shown by the two international bodies of football, FIFA and AFC, whereas Geeta Rana continues to be supported by the National Sports Council. Rana has no real power to send the national team abroad, as neither FIFA and AFC recognise her camp. One thing is certain: Thapa may have had serious allegations of corruption and nepotism against him during his term in office, but the truth is that he has contributed a lot for the game in the country. In addition to this, he was also a national player and led the team for a considerable period, through which he can easily garner the public support he badly needs.

As for Geeta Rana, her management policies and elaborate plans to take the game to all districts in the country seem to have impressed many. However, Rana lacks Thapa's experience in the field, a much-needed factor to lead the nation's most loved game. Most football fans agree on that count. Nepali football is officially at a stalemate. Players refuse to budge until the controversy is over, the NSC does not recognise the Thapa faction and so will not let him take the players to the qualifiers, and FIFA and AFC do not even consider Rana. To make matters worse, NSC member-secretary

Binod Shankar Palikhe has threatened to ban players for five years if they league up with the Thapa camp.

Meanwhile Thapa has said that he has no problems in taking the team selected by Rana to the qualifiers. Rana however knows that letting him do so will only boost his image. With Thapa and Rana refusing to come to any agreement, players fear that they stand to suffer in long run. "Football administrators think that players can be ignored and they can do whatever they want," says Upendra Man Singh.

In the last six months, neither Thapa nor Rana tried to call any of the national players. The players have not received their monthly allowance of Rs 2000 for the last five months. They accuse both sides of disregarding them during the rest of the year, and say they were only asked to join the camps when the qualifying matches approached. For the few that each side has managed to pull in, the Rana led ANFA has started training camps at ANFA complex in Satdobato while the Thapa faction team is training in the Engineering Campus grounds in Pulchowk.

Meanwhile most of the main players are in a dilemma. "Binod Palikhe has promised an alternative plan to send the national squad to the qualifiers," says Singh. That leaves the question: How can the NSC, which is the governing body of all sporting associations in the country, solve the problem by taking sides? And if that weren't enough, there are rumours that national coach Stephen Constantine, who's done so well with the team (#29), is so sick of the whole mess that he's thinking of quitting. ♦

Don out at 92

Cricket legend Sir Donald Bradman, the best batsman in the game's history, has died aged 92. Aussie Sir Donald, who had an amazing Test average of 99.94, died at home in Adelaide. He was believed to have had pneumonia and had been ill for some time.



The Don dominated cricket for 20 years. He scored 117 centuries, including 29 in only 80 Test innings. Among his feats were scoring 300 in one day and making a record 974 runs in one series against England in 1930. The dad-of-two was knighted in 1949. Ex-England fast bowler Fred Trueman said: "Don was a wonderful man. It is very sad." Former Test umpire Dickie Bird added: "No one will get near that average. He was a wonderful player—a genius." (Sun)

Gender bender

A Nigerian woman footballer forced out of the female team after reports questioning her gender is pinning her hopes of a return to football on a painful operation. Three years ago, Iyabo Abade, 23, was top scorer in Nigeria's female football league, netting 30 goals a season, and selected for the national squad. Suspicions about her gender led to a confrontation with team-mates and a tearful 'confession' in a national newspaper that, while a fully formed female, she also has an Adam's apple and small male genitals.

Acknowledging her "painful" situation, Abade insists she wanted to play but only for a female team. "I'm a woman and I want to play where I belong," she says. Thrown out of football since 1998, she has not played professionally since but is coaching a female team. Born in a village in old Bendel State in southeast Nigeria, Abade was raised a girl and is a woman "in every way, just with a difference," she said. However, she accepts that if she is to return to football, she needs an operation. "I am told it will cost about \$ 20,000. I want to undergo the operation but I cannot do it here in Nigeria because I don't want to risk my life. "Somebody has actually discussed with a hospital in the United States where they can do it successfully," she said, adding so far she had raised over \$ 2,000, with some of that money coming from players in the men's national team. The footballer said that if she can have the operation, she hopes still to become the best female player in the world.

Nigerian sports journalist Bassey Ekpo said Abade certainly had talent, and if able to get an operation, could still be a force to reckon with. Abade also compared her predicament to that of another Nigerian, Arsenal star Nwankwo Kanu, who made a dramatic comeback to the game after he was diagnosed in 1996 with a life-threatening heart ailment. "Kanu came off the operating theatre table to be voted the best player in Africa. I will be back too in a very big way because football is my life," she said.

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An Oriental potentate in Louis Napoleon’s court

Four hundred miles from London is Paris, the French sovereign’s capital. The journey involves a sea-crossing of eighty miles. The Prime Minister set out by rail from Belait [England] three hours before nightfall and reached the coast by evening. During the crossing by steamer everyone was giddy and sick. A gale had arisen and the waves it produced rocked the ship. Nine hours after nightfall the Prime Minister reached the coast and got some sleep in a hotel. In the morning he boarded a train and reached Paris three hours after dawn. At the news that the Gorkha Prime Minister General Jang Bahadur Kunwar Ranaji was arriving a crowd of one hundred and twenty-five thousand had gathered, including people of all classes. The government had arranged for his stay in a famous house in the lovely city of Paris. A great amount of food and other necessities awaited him there. The French Prime Minister escorted him to the house. He was treated with great consideration and attention.

The day after, the French Prime Minister came to take him for a drive in a carriage and showed him all the sights: the interior and exterior of the palace, storehouses, parks, gardens, canals, tanks and cisterns, paintings, dance-shows in various places, fortifications, the city centre, elephants and horses, strange animals and birds from different countries, and churches. The local merchants and craftsmen came bringing wonderful things. The Prime Minister bought between a hundred and a hundred and fifty thousand rupees worth of items.

At this time the French sovereign [the president, Louis Napoleon] was in the west of the country. After about a week he returned to Paris and the following day sent an invitation for the Nepalese Prime Minister to come to the palace. The sovereign, who was seated in the drawing-room, got up and came to the door to receive him. He took him by the hand and greeted him. He asked him about his journey and the Prime Minister gave him a full account. Speaking in complimentary terms the sovereign told him that he had heard how in Hindustan the Gorkha and British territories bordered one another and that it was by divine providence that they were actually meeting. Then he said that if there was anything he needed or if he wished to see dancing, fortifications, the army, the lawbook, arsenals, or anything else the country had to offer, then he should mention it to his cousin, the Prime Minister. At this point the sovereign called his own Prime Minister into his presence. The interview was a very courteous one.

France has an army of six hundred thousand. The former sovereign’s army and the common people staged a revolt, established a republic, drove out the sovereign and made Bonaparte President. As President he has kept the people and the army happy with his policies. There is dancing and entertainment in various places. Immensely wealthy merchants live in Paris and the city’s inhabitants are very rich. The city is full of splendid mansions with glass windows, glass roofs and various kinds of pictures. Chandeliers provide the illumination. Gold and silver are used for making pots and pans or for gilding them, and for pictures in the houses. They also make gold and silver thread used for embroidering hems and for tassles. These are the only uses for gold and silver. No one wears these metals as jewellery. They wear precious stones if they can afford them, otherwise no ornaments at all. The women, whatever their class, all wear a dress of satin, a woollen shawl, stockings and gloves, a white hat and shoes. The men are all dressed on the one pattern: a hat of black woollen cloth, a shirt, trousers, gloves, socks and a scarf. The main streets are one hundred and fifty feet broad, the other streets seventy-five. Throughout the city squares, large open spaces and streets are paved with stone. On the roadsides shade is provided by large trees. Thousands of coaches move along the roads. There is no sewage, rubbish, mud or dirt visible in the streets. No one is to be seen in the city wearing dirty, poor quality or torn clothes.

In the midst of the town are huge parks in which flowers of many different colours make a beautiful display. Parks are full of birds from different countries, deer, varieties of bear, monkeys, zebras, rhinos, buffaloes, sheep, goats and other kinds of animals, flowers and trees. The streets are built as if in a picture. There are shops selling things to eat—bread, meat and wine. The gas-lights in parks, the city centre, squares and large open spaces, in the streets and in the windows are as bright as moonlight. Always and everywhere lights shine through the night as if it were Diwali. When night falls the young people of the city, both men and women, come to the parks, dance and buy and eat bread, meat and wine. Laughing and joking, they enjoy themselves greatly. Some learn to ride horses, others fire rifles at targets. Thus people enjoy themselves greatly, night and day. The army is stationed on all sides of the city at a distance of ten or twelve miles in the forts and barracks. Seeing this city of Paris is like being on Mount Kailas, and indeed, one finds oneself suspecting it might really be Kailas. In the middle of the city there is a tower built from cannon-balls brought back by Bonaparte after his conquest of nine realms. By ascending the tower one gets a wonderful view of the heaven-like city. The Prime Minister was taken to a number of palaces built for pleasure and relaxation. In the drawing-rooms of the richly decorated palaces carpets, tables and couches are placed at intervals, and there are chandeliers, mirrors, pictures, bowls of gold and silver, and different kinds of vases, all making a splendid display. From the windows on one side can be seen huge ponds, with delightful fountains sending water up to a height of a hundred and fifty feet. On another side are huge gardens. The spreading branches of the groves provide deep shade.

The nobles are all energetically engaged in their own work. No one quarrels with anyone else. The chief nobles are ten or twelve ministers, all with equal powers. If one of them does wrong, the other ten ministers all judge his case.

Fatanbulu

Fifty-four miles from the French city is a large forest, called Fatanbulu [Fontainebleu], in the midst of which a town has been built. Two regiments of foot guards and one of cavalry are stationed there. There is a palace which cost seventy million rupees to build, is five storeys high and has hanging in it pictures of sovereigns of the last three hundred years. There are pictures showing the royal army fighting in different places, with nymphs watching from flying

Giri ja Prasad Koirala may yet become the second Nepali prime minister to visit France. The first was none other than Jang Bahadur Rana, who made a 40-day stopover on his way back from his 1849-50 England trip. The Nepali strongman had been a big hit with London society. Besides exploits like paying one of the highest sums ever to a prostitute, the 32-year-old Jang Bahadur was also able to impress the English in numerous ways. Not least by his exoticism, since he was, after all, the first ruler from the East to go to England. It was a similar curiosity that greeted Jang Bahadur when he landed on French soil on 14 August 1850.

Jang Bahadur’s Europe tour has been described in *Jang Bahadurko Belait-Yatra* written by someone in his retinue (its authorship has not been proved). British scholar John Whelpton has translated the text and published it with his own commentary as *Jang Bahadur in Europe* (Sahayogi, 1983). What follows is an excerpt dealing with Jang Bahadur’s sojourn in France, and the box is an amusing incident as reported in a French newspaper.

chariots. The chandeliers are past counting. Chairs, couches and thrones, all kept clean, are positioned at intervals. In the worship-room a glittering collection of chalices, ornaments, costumes and rugs are placed as offerings to a god who looks as if he is about to speak. These objects, which defy description, have been left undisturbed for the last three years. In the reception room are various articles made of gold: pictures, chandeliers and the surrounds of glass windows. Rubies, emeralds, diamonds, pearls and coral are set in the sovereign’s table. Opening the windows on all sides of the drawing-room, one sees to the south large ponds covering an area two miles in circumference, surrounded by stone steps and containing very clear, cold water with fish and swans. To the east are large gardens full of different kinds of flowers in bloom. At the time of the Prime Minister’s visit several varieties of fruit were ready to pick: pomegranates, grapes, pears, apples and many others. Fountains water the trees along picturesque paths. To the north is a fine clean city with a large market. To the west, a large open space where at the time a thousand cavalry were drilling. Citizens had come in large numbers to watch the delightful sight. The local people are very pleasant and, as it is neither too hot nor too cold, it is a very comfortable place.

Fatanbulu has a connection with Bonaparte who gathered an army of 500,000, defeated the peoples of seven realms and then went into Russia. The Russian sovereign lost confidence and evacuating his own army and people from his capital, set it on fire. It started to snow and Bonaparte’s army was unable to find shelter and was exposed to the winter weather, as a result of which only three hundred thousand out of the army of five million survived. The forces of the sovereigns of nine realms took this opportunity to come after him; now that Bonaparte was in trouble and retreating they were in pursuit. As Bonaparte neared his own city of Paris, all the ordinary citizens appealed to him. “The five gods have turned against you,” they said, “your soldiers have been killed, in Russia and now the sovereigns of the nine realms are pursuing you. So you must go to the town of Fatanbulu in the forest, where there is a fine palace for you to stay in.” They said they would help him in other ways, and Bonaparte, accepting that the people had spoken correctly, went to the town in the forest called Fatanbulu and stayed there. At this point the sovereigns of the nine realms consulted together. They concluded they would never conquer the country. Its people were too strong, and, besides, God had already punished them enough. One sovereign had been defeated by nine and it was not right that the country should be taken over by any one of them alone. Besides the people would not accept such an arrangement. Therefore they ought to put on the throne the former French sovereign who had been deposed by Bonaparte and who was now living in London. Napoleon would be sent to the island of Yalavu [Elba], and given an allowance of one hundred thousand rupees a month, equivalent to one million two hundred thousand a year, while the old French sovereign would be restored and they themselves would in future remain in their own countries. The agreement also provided that if any of the sovereigns committed any offence the other eight would combine to defeat him. The former French sovereign was enthroned, while Bonaparte, after signing a statement that he had abdicated willingly, went to Yalavu.

The President asked the Nepalese Prime Minister whether he would like to visit Fatanbulu as it was where the nine sovereigns had concluded their agreement. Accompanied by the President’s cousin, the Minister, the Prime Minister travelled by rail to the town of Fatanbulu. He was told about the forest town’s palace, the ponds, the barracks, the gardens, the fortifications, the cavalry’s training, and about Bonaparte’s exploits. The Prime Minister was then taken in a carriage to see the whole of the forest. He was shown the work that each previous sovereign had done and was treated with great consideration. Then he made the return journey of 54 miles to Paris. The round trip of 108 miles was completed in just under three hours—their speed was faster than the wind.

The whole country is full of gardens and the people grow a lot of fruit. Rice is not cultivated but wheat, oats and cotton are. It is forbidden to slaughter any livestock within the city of Paris. They do the slaughtering outside and bring the meat into the city. They abide by regulations that govern food, agriculture, commerce and military service. The common people, army, nobles and sovereign are all governed by the Parament [Parliament] assembly and both people and

army are very content. The city of Paris is continually expanding. The French create standards for everything and work very skilfully. In skilfulness they are the teachers of the whole world. There are palaces built on ten or twelve sites and contingents of the army are stationed at intervals everywhere.

Versailles

Fourteen miles from the city of Paris is a place called Versel. For the last fifteen hundred years French sovereigns have been building a palace there and construction is still going on. The palace covers an area two miles in circumference, and is surrounded by huge gardens and ponds. There is a maintained forest all around it and in the middle of a clearing is a small city, the size of Patan in Nepal. Roads lead away from it on all sides. The place is full of flower gardens and fruit trees and seems just like heaven. There are barracks and forts and two thousand troops are stationed there under the command of a colonel. The sovereign gave instructions for the Nepalese Prime Minister to be shown this place and sent his cousin to accompany him. They completed the journey of fourteen miles by rail in twenty-five minutes, and local senior officials gave them a courteous welcome. They took the keys of the palace and showed them the reception and other rooms, balconies, terraces, ball-room, treasury, store rooms, in fact the entire palace. Great travellers and learned men have written that no other palace anywhere in the world is as beautiful. Every room, whatever its size, is full of gilded paintings. The pictures and chandeliers are beyond counting. In the whole palace there are 250 reception and other rooms. In every room there are huge paintings of battles fought by previous sovereigns. Bonaparte is shown making his brothers sovereigns after defeating the sovereigns of seven nations, performing mighty deeds himself on the battlefield, installing himself as sovereign, marrying a sovereign’s daughter and winning great victories after invading different countries with an army of five million. All the paintings show armies, chieftains, fortifications, and maps of different countries and the panorama defies description.

Show of arms

One day the sovereign of Paris asked the Gorkha Prime Minister if he had any special request. When he replied that he would like to see a parade of nine hundred thousand troops, the French sovereign said he would show him such a parade at the barracks called Barsya. However, all the nobles now appealed to the sovereign. “This place,” they said, “is called repaplin [republic]. If a hundred thousand troops are brought together the army could do whatever it liked.” So the Prime Minister, the Commander-in-Chief and the nobles of the Parament council asked the sovereign that hundreds of thousands of troops should not be brought together and he agreed. He ordered that a parade of fifty thousand be held instead, and so cavalry and infantry were drawn from nearby barracks and a parade of that size held. Salutes were given and guns fired in salute. The entire army saluted the Prime Minister and he was shown its drill. In order to see this parade senior officials and lady sahibs of the city of Paris had driven out in thousands of carriages. Everyone paid his respects to the Nepalese Prime Minister as a very distinguished man. The French nobles, councillors and older people remarked to one another that the Nepalese Prime Minister was a man of great distinction; he was handsome in appearance, wealthy, talented and courageous and there was alertness in his way of walking, sitting and talking. They said he was an intelligent man who wanted to see, hear and find out everything for himself, that he did not consider it a burden to spend his money when it was right to do so, that it was a point of pride with him to give to everyone and take from no one. It was said in the assembly that in the nature of his actions, in the appropriateness of his speech, in the way he looked at things, spoke, walked, laughed and sat he resembled their own former sovereign and would surely prove to be a great man. ♦

(Picture shows Jang Bahadur as depicted in The Illustrated News of London, and subsequently in the French newspaper L’illustration. From Jang Bahadur in Europe.)

‘Indian’ prince in ruckus

The following embarrassing details of the Indian [sic] prince’s departure were reported in ‘Evenement’:

His retinue had gone on ahead with the baggage and the prince had kept with him only two colonels (his relatives) and principal members of the embassy.

The departure was not a trouble-free one and caused a minor disturbance in the Saint Honore district. Either because interpreters had made a mistake with the bills, or because merchants had tried to over-charge, the distinguished visitors were assailed at the last moment by various demands for money. Discussion was difficult because the French had to be translated into Hindustani, and as neither side could understand the other the argument inevitably became heated. The tradesmen became very angry and closed the doors of the Hotel Sinet, refusing to let the prince go until they had received

satisfaction. There came a point when Jung Bahadur himself, as he was explaining his meaning with a gesture, struck a coachman with considerable force. The latter, heedless of diplomatic immunity, replied in kind. Three Englishmen accompanying the prince had to intervene to stop the fight.

A more or less satisfactory settlement was arrived at and the two Indians were released and able to make their departure in two Messagerie coaches which were waiting at the door. But they appear to have completely misunderstood the rules of precedence governing stage-coach seats. In fact the ambassador and two colonels installed themselves with the interpreters inside, placed three servants on the front seat, and put the venerable Brahmin accompanying them up on top. Thus arranged, they drove off at high speed, amidst the indignation of some, the regrets of others and the astonishment of all.

—La Presse, 2 October 1850

ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

Nepali and Hindi movies online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

EATING OUT

Lunch at Ghar-e-Kabab A fixed lunch spread at Ghare-e-Kabab 20 February—6 March. 12 noon—2.30 pm. Rs 250 for vegetarians and Rs 300 for others. Hotel de l'Annapurna. 221711

Authentic Nepali Sekuwa (Barbecue) Regular Friday night Sekuwa in the lamp-lit courtyard setting of Dwarika's Hotel. Select your own appetisers, momos, salads and choice of meats, as well as delicious desserts. Package includes one free drink and lucky draw. Reservations recommended. 479488

Barbecue at the Ropes The first barbecue open for lunch everyday. Over 20 dishes to choose from, served with splendid views of the Himalayas. 12 noon—2.30pm at the Sky Terrace, Hotel Everest. Reservations recommended. 488100

Organic vegetable market and lunch Special vegetarian organic lunch every Sunday at the Summit Hotel, Kupondole. 10am—12.30pm. Rs 350 + tax. 521810

Weekend Brunch Mixed cuisine with a salad bar & desserts at The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel. Every Saturday 10.30am—2.30pm. Rs 550. 411818

Chulo Batta Local Nepali cuisine buffet lunch with live Nepali music at the Sunrise Cafe, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Rs 700 + tax. 12 noon onwards. 248999

Indian, continental, and oriental cuisine, Kadhai food and curries now at the Hotel Yak & Yeti, prepared by the world-class chef Arun Kumar Tyagi who has 10 years of experience in five-star cooking. 248999

EXHIBITION

Wangden carpets of Tibet Exhibition and sale of carpets from the Wangden Valley in Tibet. Called "Wangden Drumse," these carpets are technically and aesthetically distinct from the more common "Drumse" or "Gamdrum" carpets produced in the rest of Tibet. They are commonly believed to be the first type of knotted pile rugs woven in Tibet. 24 February-25 March. Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 413580

Exhibition of paintings by Victor Nadiozhin a Moscow painter whose work is inspired by late 19th and early 20th century traditions. Realistic landscapes and panoramic features. Russian Centre for Science and Culture. 27 February-3 March, 10am-4pm. 415453

MUSIC

Fever at the Jazz Bar Cadenza (Tuesday and Thursday), live Irish band (Friday), and solo piano the rest of the week. International cuisine and drinks, espresso, cognac and cigars. 412999.

Jazz by Cadenza at Upstairs Restaurant, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7.30pm—10pm.

Live Shows Various bands at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. Every evening. 416071

Chakra The Piano Lounge at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. Every evening 7pm onwards. 248999

Unplugged Syabru Lama plays guitar at the Coffee Shop, Hotel De l' Annapurna. Every evening 7.30pm—10pm. 221711

Classical Guitar Kishor Gurung plays classical favourites at the Chimney, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Everyday 8pm onwards. 248999

DANCE

Classical Nepali Dances based on Buddhist and Hindu epics and the Tantric pantheon at the Great Pagoda, Hotel Vajra. Every Tuesday, 7pm. Rs 300. 271545

Ballads and Dances of Old Tibet performed by Tsering Gurmey and Tsering Paljor at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra. Every Thursday, 7pm. Rs 400. 271545

Traditional Dances every evening at Dwarika's Hotel courtyard. Drinks from two bars. No entrance charge, however reservations are recommended for diners. 479488

Sunday Night Fever. Free dance classes every Sunday by dancemaster Andreas Lehrke. Salsa, Swing and more. The Piano Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 8.30pm. 248999

EVENTS

Feng Shui seminar Free seminar with Bill Kane, a Master of the traditional forms of Feng Shui. Friday, 2 March, 6pm. Ring 413580 to reserve a place.

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Scam's Bar

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QUICKWORD 22

by CROSS EYES

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- Entries have to reach Himalmedia, by 5 pm, Tuesday.
- The winner will be announced in the coming issue.
- The prize has to be collected from Himalmedia within a week of the announcement. Please come with an ID.

Across

- Up and down, like rasta man (3)
- Wear down with a plait maybe (6)
- Top of the deck (3)
- Estimated, with a screw perhaps (5)
- The Holy___ (3)
- Tend at presence (6)
- Serengeti run (6)
- Recent foot and mouth enclosure (3)
- Veined gemstone (4)
- Vatsyayan's magnum opus (2)
- Extra reaches for Ms Barrymore (2)
- Erase the epochs perhaps (4)
- Short teller memory (3)
- Protective hoverer (6)
- Cultivable (6)
- A little Scottish (3)
- De-gonad the animal (6)
- All in the genes (3)
- French for the plush (6)
- Animal with pink milk (3)

Down

- Operatic bass (5)
- Water body of fantasy (5)
- Redneck girthy (5)
- Marine medium as bowel regulator (4)
- Much exported Indonesian art (5)
- Trail depression (3)
- Long time, Geriatric (4)
- Tend to knocking in (4)
- Whirly Murphy (4)
- Fire with sharp instrument (3)
- Minute quickie (3)
- Talk electronic with former spouse (5)
- Boisterous Howdy (5)
- Gladiator space (5)
- Mad chunk of meat (5)
- Sun, sea and stuff in your pants (4)
- Sal, ash or baobab (4)
- Inflict carnivore damage (4)
- Archaic for withered seer (4)
- Heat unit in bitumen (3)

QUICKWORD ANSWER 21

Of the eight correct entries, the lucky winner is **Bela Malik**.

To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to crossword@himalmedia.com. Entries can be dropped off at Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur.

Name.....
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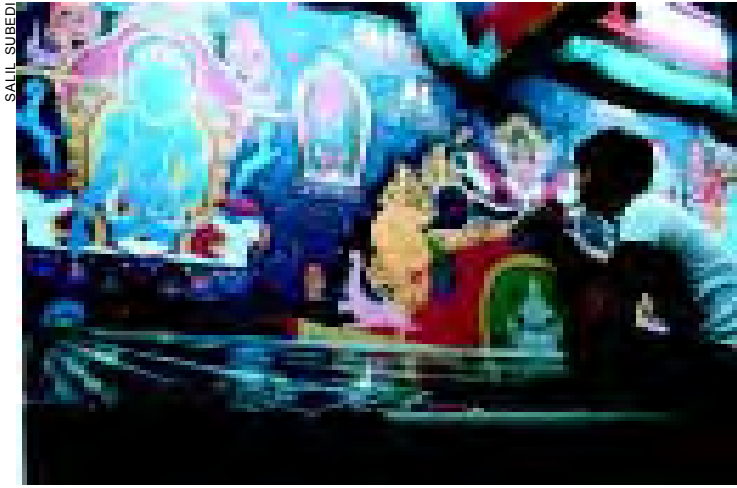
NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

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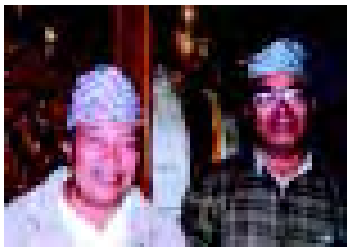
Nepal 's biggest poubha mural



SALIL SUBEDI

As you enter the courtyard of the Hiranya Varna Mahavihar—Patan's Golden Temple—on the left you find the realm of the Amitabha Buddha, Sukhavati Bhuvan. These days, there's an unusual sight there: five twenty-something Newari artists are silently creating a poubha, the ancient devotional art of the Kathmandu Valley, on its walls. (See NT # 5 for more on poubha.) Minutes, hours, days pass as they face the walls, adding patterns, colours and nuanced shades that will eventually create a splendid fresco.

"Painting the wall is entirely different from painting on canvas. We don't mind crawling on the floor to get the strokes and the colour just right. Being able to do this is beautiful. We're really lucky," smile the young artists who are almost halfway through their task. The eventual aim is to have poubha murals representing hundreds of deities of the Varjyana Buddhist pantheon. "This will probably be the only poubha fresco in the Valley," says senior



SALIL SUBEDI

poubha artist Lok Chitrakar, who is overseeing the artistic side of the project.

The artists use the same colours, derived from stones from Tibet and South India, that they use to paint poubha on canvas. Poubha artists normally have an assistant to make the colour pastes for them, but here even senior participants in the project, like the *ajju*—the caretaker of the Golden Temple—join in the collective effort. "We want to make it real," says Drabya Ratna Shakya, the present *ajju*, one of a committee of 20 caretakers. Two *ajjus*, Drabya Ratna Shakya and Juju Ratna Shakya are constantly supervising the poubha project, and Asatana Shakya, the secretary of the Hiranya Varna Mahavihar management committee, is also closely involved with the undertaking.

There are poubha murals at the

Poubha artists are set to create a huge mural inside Patan's Golden Temple, melding devotional art and architectural preservation.

responsible for supporting the staff and financing the rest of the project.

As the bell tolls in the courtyard, it will also be for those who are contributing their time, effort and creativity to enabling the Golden Temple's Sukhavati Bhuvan move seamlessly—and intact—into a new millennium. ♦



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

HAPPENINGS



GIRIJA OUT!: The Youth Forum of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party organised a motorcycle rally to demand the resignation of the prime minister.



FINDING THE MARK: General Secretary of the CPN (UML) tries his hand at archery during the 19th Magar Day celebrations in Kathmandu.



CARAVAN MAN: French photographer Eric Valli (better known now as the director of Caravan) interacting with Nepali photographers at a programme organised by the National Forum of Photo-Journalists.

mercantile

Sharp



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

We have known for quite some time now that existing indicators of development do not give a true picture of a nation's well-being. Going by GNP per capita, for example, Nepal is somewhere at the bottom of the heap, whereas we know it for a fact that our country is actually quite advanced in more ways than one. But because this is such a closely guarded secret, most of us are not aware that Nepal is actually an Economic Tiger. Meow. And we have no one to blame but ourselves—here we are wallowing in prosperity, and we don't even know it. The word has got around in deal-making circles: "Nepalis only pretend to be poor, they can pay twice as much as the

this parameter, Nepal is one of the most productive nations on earth. Our civil servants, schools and industries are closed for 217 days in a year giving us a GNHI of 65%, and despite that we still manage to get all our work done. EU countries with very low GNHI have now come to realise that they need to loosen up if they are to catch up. We in Nepal are slacking off, though. How come we didn't get a national holiday when the Minister of Foreign Objects returned from Burma, or when the Tourist Minister went to Madrid? Vigilance. That is what is required if we are to maintain our GNHI lead.

- **Parliament Not Functioning Days Quotient (PNFDQ).** This is an indicator of how vibrant democracy is in a particular country. With a PNFDQ of 0.9, Nepal is right up there with vivacious democracies like North Korea, Bihar, or Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Gross National Holiday Index



going rate for arms and dams. Just make sure you go through the right channels."

All this affluence is now becoming a disadvantage. That is why we need to find new and more accurate ways to measure development so that we can do justice to our national pride. The King of Bhutan, worried that his citizens were becoming rather sad, had the right idea and embarked on a campaign to raise his country's Gross National Happiness. And today, as we know, Bhutan in general is a glad place. Nepal, too, must find the right indicators and statistics to prove that it is rich so that we can at last start openly flaunting our wealth. Some ideas:

- **The Gross National Holiday Index (GNHI).** Going by

- **Corruption Prevalence Ratio (CPR)** is arrived at by calculating the square root of the total GDP with the wealth-redistribution potential for this important sector of the informal economy and multiplying it with an inverse decimal for the public expenditure as a part of total budget. For example if 35 percent of the bureaucracy is actually moonlighting as Commercial Desk Workers (CDW) then that gives us a CPR of 0.0006, at par with countries like Equatorial Guinea or Vanuatu.

- **Instant Noodle Index (INI).** Asia's economic tigers have shown, that there is a direct correlation between the consumption of noodles and purchasing power parity. Nepal's exponential growth in instant noodle production gives us an INI of 9.9—the same quality of life as Taiwan or Singapore.

- **Beer Belly Barometer (BBB).** The more beer a country brews, the more powerful it is. Just as Germany is now Europe's economic engine, Nepal's BBB has now expanded the per capita girth of an average Nepali, giving us the status of a Regional Beer Power.

There are many more indices that prove that we are a country on the move, but I have just been informed that unbeknownst to us all, today has been declared a national holiday because our Minister for Thumb Twiddling, Procrastination and Local Development has returned from the Third International Conference on the Impact of International Conferences on Greenhouse Gas Emissions that took place in Sao Tome and Principe last week. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Nepali New Yorker

The Upper West Side of Manhattan, NY, is where intellectuals hang out. One such is Kaski-born Ashok Gurung, who for the last decade or so has been working to change the world. It could do certainly do with some improvement.

Ashok started working in development with agencies like George Soros' Trace Foundation in New York. His focus was on the Himalayan region and Tibet, developing and implementing the Foundation's work in the Tibetan areas of China. Before that, he was associated with the Trickle-Up Programme in New York as a programme adviser.

Ashok later moved to Columbia University and took a Master's degree from the School of International Affairs (and is now a visiting lecturer there). Ashok has also worked in Burma and Belize. In New York, he also worked with UNDP and UNICEF, again involved in development work in Tibet.

Last year, when the Ford Foundation decided to match a grant from Ted Turner and Bill Gates, they created an endowment of \$330 million. This commitment features a new Ford Foundation International Fellowships Programme (IFP) that will provide \$280 million over the next 10 years to support post-baccalaureate study for fellows from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin



A Nepali from Kaski takes charge of the Ford Foundation's ambitious new programme to support bright young people from developing countries.

America and Russia. IFP is designed as a major graduate fellowships programme and a complementary undergraduate initiative to help prepare a new generation of future leaders for the challenges of the 21st century. It aims to broaden the talent pool of future leaders by making a special effort to recruit exceptional individuals who would otherwise lack the opportunities for advanced study and interacting with a wider range of people. And whom should Ford Foundation choose to

help direct this prestigious programme? Ashok Gurung. At IFP Ashok's job will be a crucial one, but he is modest about it. "It's great to be associated with such an innovative new programme," Ashok told us on a visit to Kathmandu recently. It's not only the programme he has to think about—he's also a doctoral candidate in applied anthropology at Columbia. From Namarjung in Kaski district to saving the world—that certainly is a long way. ♦

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