



RECIPES FOR DISASTER



20

Delhi sneezes...



Nobody wanted to tell us why six tankers carrying diesel adulterated with over 50 percent kerosene took three days to off-load their fuel into the Nepal Oil Corporation's storage tanks near the Tribhuvan International Airport. But we found out the NOC and tanker owners were haggling about the bribe. The government set up an inquiry commission on fuel adulteration to file a report in a month. Three months ago. Looks like business as usual. p 8

So the women cook and clean, collect water. The elderly stay at home taking care of the grandchildren. There is a marked absence of young men. They used to traditionally migrate to “Kalapar” (India) from here for seasonal work—there was never enough food to get by on what the arid fields produced. But since the fighting started five years ago, there has been an even bigger exodus of young men. Afraid of being victimised by the police or recruited by the Maoists, most able-bodied men have stayed away. Along the village trails, the children go to school clutching copy-books under their arms past the tiny bazaar with its *pasal*, a tailor shop and branch offices of the district agricultural office and the government veterinarian.

"Everyone in the village extends support in cash or kind. You can't be different. There's fear. They have the guns," says Mansaram. The Madhichaur police post is abandoned, its wooden beams used to dry clothes. No longer threatened by government security forces, members of the Maoist militia are relaxed. Civilians in sarongs, young women with 303s

there is any suspicious movement of police, they are

"When we're not on duty, we often lay down our guns to help on community farms, with construction projects and give the peasants a helping hand when they need it," says Comrade Sujhav, as he prepares bamboo stakes with his khukuri to repair the roof of a villager's house. It is hard to believe that this soft-spoken farmer leads an 11-member squad that has been trained to kill with his khukuri in the name of the People's War.

Contd. on p2

The government move follows close on the heels of the announcement of the Maoists' new Prachanda Path doctrine that lays down a new direction in their revolution that many saw as a mellowing of their previous hardline position. The government had to respond, and what better than to make public this list. For his part, Poudel admitted he couldn't figure out Chairman Prachanda: "We see confusion in Maoist thinking, they have to be clear about their position for talks. Sugar-coated words alone will not do." Depending on how the Maoists respond to this government overture, the plan is to have informal meetings to iron out preliminaries like logistics, naming of delegates and deciding the agenda. That would lead to round two—of real political bargaining.

The official toll: 1563 dead—1018 Maoists, 278 civilians, and 267 police personnel. ♦



Magar children and the hospital in Rolpa that never treated anyone.

1811/12/13/14/15/16/17/18/19/20/21/22/23/24/25/26/27/28/29/30/31/32/33/34/35/36/37/38/39/40/41/42/43/44/45/46/47/48/49/50/51/52/53/54/55/56/57/58/59/60/61/62/63/64/65/66/67/68/69/70/71/72/73/74/75/76/77/78/79/80/81/82/83/84/85/86/87/88/89/90/91/92/93/94/95/96/97/98/99/100/101/102/103/104/105/106/107/108/109/110/111/112/113/114/115/116/117/118/119/120/121/122/123/124/125/126/127/128/129/130/131/132/133/134/135/136/137/138/139/140/141/142/143/144/145/146/147/148/149/150/151/152/153/154/155/156/157/158/159/160/161/162/163/164/165/166/167/168/169/170/171/172/173/174/175/176/177/178/179/180/181/182/183/184/185/186/187/188/189/190/191/192/193/194/195/196/197/198/199/200/201/202/203/204/205/206/207/208/209/210/211/212/213/214/215/216/217/218/219/220/221/222/223/224/225/226/227/228/229/230/231/232/233/234/235/236/237/238/239/240/241/242/243/244/245/246/247/248/249/250/251/252/253/254/255/256/257/258/259/260/261/262/263/264/265/266/267/268/269/270/271/272/273/274/275/276/277/278/279/280/281/282/283/284/285/286/287/288/289/290/291/292/293/294/295/296/297/298/299/300/301/302/303/304/305/306/307/308/309/310/311/312/313/314/315/316/317/318/319/320/321/322/323/324/325/326/327/328/329/330/331/332/333/334/335/336/337/338/339/340/341/342/343/344/345/346/347/348/349/350/351/352/353/354/355/356/357/358/359/360/361/362/363/364/365/366/367/368/369/370/371/372/373/374/375/376/377/378/379/380/381/382/383/384/385/386/387/388/389/390/391/392/393/394/395/396/397/398/399/400/401/402/403/404/405/406/407/408/409/410/411/412/413/414/415/416/417/418/419/420/421/422/423/424/425/426/427/428/429/430/431/432/433/434/435/436/437/438/439/440/441/442/443/444/445/446/447/448/449/450/451/452/453/454/455/456/457/458/459/460/461/462/463/464/465/466/467/468/469/470/471/472/473/474/475/476/477/478/479/480/481/482/483/484/485/486/487/488/489/490/491/492/493/494/495/496/497/498/499/500/501/502/503/504/505/506/507/508/509/510/511/512/513/514/515/516/517/518/519/520/521/522/523/524/525/526/527/528/529/530/531/532/533/534/535/536/537/538/539/540/541/542/543/544/545/546/547/548/549/550/551/552/553/554/555/556/557/558/559/560/561/562/563/564/565/566/567/568/569/570/571/572/573/574/575/576/577/578/579/580/581/582/583/584/585/586/587/588/589/590/591/592/593/594/595/596/597/598/599/600/601/602/603/604/605/606/607/608/609/610/611/612/613/614/615/616/617/618/619/620/621/622/623/624/625/626/627/628/629/630/631/632/633/634/635/636/637/638/639/640/641/642/643/644/645/646/647/648/649/650/651/652/653/654/655/656/657/658/659/660/661/662/663/664/665/666/667/668/669/670/671/672/673/674/675/676/677/678/679/680/681/682/683/684/685/686/687/688/689/690/691/692/693/694/695/696/697/698/699/700/701/702/703/704/705/706/707/708/709/710/711/712/713/714/715/716/717/718/719/720/721/722/723/724/725/726/727/728/729/730/731/732/733/734/735/736/737/738/739/740/741/742/743/744/745/746/747/748/749/750/751/752/753/754/755/756/757/758/759/760/761/762/763/764/765/766/767/768/769/770/771/772/773/774/775/776/777/778/779/780/781/782/783/784/785/786/787/788/789/790/791/792/793/794/795/796/797/798/799/800/801/802/803/804/805/806/807/808/809/810/811/812/813/814/815/816/817/818/819/820/821/822/823/824/825/826/827/828/829/830/831/832/833/834/835/836/837/838/839/840/841/842/843/844/845/846/847/848/849/850/851/852/853/854/855/856/857/858/859/860/861/862/863/864/865/866/867/868/869/870/871/872/873/874/875/876/877/878/879/880/881/882/883/884/885/886/887/888/889/890/891/892/893/894/895/896/897/898/899/900/901/902/903/904/905/906/907/908/909/910/911/912/913/914/915/916/917/918/919/920/921/922/923/924/925/926/927/928/929/930/931/932/933/934/935/936/937/938/939/940/941/942/943/944/945/946/947/948/949/950/951/952/953/954/955/956/957/958/959/960/961/962/963/964/965/966/967/968/969/970/971/972/973/974/975/976/977/978/979/980/981/982/983/984/985/986/987/988/989/990/991/992/993/994/995/996/997/998/999/1000/1001/1002/1003/1004/1005/1006/1007/1008/1009/1010/1011/1012/1013/1014/1015/1016/1017/1018/1019/1020/1021/1022/1023/1024/1025/1026/1027/1028/1029/1030/1031/1032/1033/1034/1035/1036/1037/1038/1039/1040/1041/1042/1043/1044/

DISCERNI DAVOINE



LOOK WHO'S EVIL NOW

When the devotees of the Sakyamuni in the Kushan empire, nearly two thousand years ago, set about carving two giant statues of the Buddha on the rock-conglomerate escarpments of present-day central Afghanistan, little did they know what would be wrought in the first year of the third millennium.

By ordering the destruction of the two towering statues in Bamiyan (it is not entirely clear that they are totally destroyed at the moment of going to press) and hundreds or perhaps thousands of others scattered about in the moribund museums and archaeological sites around the country, the Afghan leader Mullah Omar and the Ulema as a whole have shown themselves to be a) intolerant, b) anti-intellectual and anti-knowledge, c) anti-history and anti-heritage and d) ignorant of economics.

Given that Sakyamuni himself was born in present-day Nepal, and given the large Buddhist flock in this country, it is natural that the destruction of Buddhist iconography hits us harder in the heart. While the soul of Himalayan Buddhism is Mahayanic and Vajrayanic and the period the Bamiyan Buddhas epitomise, Gandharan, both nevertheless have the underpinnings in the message of the Sakyamuni, which is the display of *karuna*, the feeling of compassion for fellow creatures.

What the Taliban of Afghanistan have done by destroying the Buddhist heritage of the country is show lack of *karuna* on an unimaginable scale. Firstly, it is lack of empathy for the devotees and artisans of nearly two millennia ago, who built these images, long before Islam and its anti-idolatry message slipped into the rugged mountains of Central Asia. Secondly, it is lack of understanding for the greater mass of humanity, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, who all share in the ownership of these images. Lastly, it shows complete disregard for the interests of the Afghans themselves, who were custodians of this heritage for the rest of civilisation and who (in better times) benefited economically from the Buddha's existence. At one time, Bamiyan's Buddhas and the nearby lakes of Band-e-Amir were the greatest tourist attractions of Afghanistan. The place will be no more than a place of mourning.

There is one lesson that can be derived at this moment of desecration, as the Sakyamuni would also perhaps have advised us. It is to learn that there is that dark patch in each of our souls, which if allowed out by the confluence of social forces, can erupt as mob action at the mass level. In the 1960s, Mao Zedong brought out the mob with his cultural revolution and destroyed the great gumbas of Tibet. In 1992, a Hindu mob violated the Babri mosque, barely 200 km south of our border in Ayodhya. We in Nepal, too, must keep guard against being manipulated by forces which allow similar actions to take place.



What we must remember in these intolerant times is that not all Muslims are Taliban, and Islamic nations have condemned the desecration of the Buddhas. And without being cynical, let us remind ourselves the Taliban is a CIA creation via Pakistani ISI deep in the Cold War years when the goal was to fight the Evil Empire. Look who is evil now. And it is US-led global geopolitics that has pushed the Afghans into a corner with sanctions, and the Taliban have reacted in the only way they know how. Speaking of which, whether the Bamiyan Buddhas (there are two of them) are or are not on the World Heritage Site list is irrelevant. The list is just a wish list. But the Buddhas are a heritage, as much or more (because of their antiquity) than the Taj Mahal. This was the kind of crisis where the new director of Unesco, should have jettisoned all other commitments, hired a jet and flown to Kabul on a rescue mission. Appointing a special representative is the old way. It does not suffice in the age of global cultural crimes against humanity.

VIEWPOINT

What the Left can right

From relatively small beginnings on 13 February, 1996, the Maoist "People's War" has, to use their own phrase, "moved from peak to peak". The Maoists have marked this achievement by christening their revolution the "Prachanda Path", and the government by the formation of an armed police force. For the first time in the last half a century "development" is gradually being pushed to the back seat. In a very unexpected way, the Maoists have provided the most telling critique of the relevance of the mode and meaning of "development" practised in Nepal over the past decades.

The People's War is Nepal's first home-grown insurrection with an explicit ideology and a pan-Nepali coverage. Over the past five years the Maoists have built an impressive, functionally efficient network of decentralised area-based guerrilla organisations capable of mobilising hundreds of youth at the local level. These organisations appear to be built on the base of poor peasants and the occupational caste groups, something no political organisation in Nepal had attempted at such a scale before. The mass of aspiring, partially educated and unemployed youth have been the breeding ground for Maoist recruits. The strength of the Maoists has been the historic weakness of the Nepali state. They have capitalised on centuries of isolation and underdevelopment of the remoter regions. Ideological cooption, extortion, loot, and



Raising the Maoist flag in a school playground

appeasement of the peasantry have all been used to good effect to mobilise local financial and combative resources to allow them to procure arms and ammunition from outside Nepal and maintain a reliable cadre base. The brutal strategy "liquidation" of "informers" and other "dubious" elements has in the short term nullified the danger of subversion from within. The logistical capability of the Maoists in terms of propaganda, recruitment, training, deployment (both for combat purposes and for propaganda) and "hiding within the masses" has, by all accounts, been remarkably effective. Whether the Maoist force can continue doing so in the event of an all-out war declared by the state is really a moot question.

The Maoist leadership has its share of problems. A decentralised command structure

can breed local "strongmen" particularly when ideological conscientisation, political and financial accountability, and reconstructive development at the local level remain weak. Maoists also appear to be plagued with problems of organisational, tactical and politico-strategic nature. But the fact is that the central government bureaucracy appears to be losing its tenuous hold on the Nepali countryside. If there were an election in the near future it is doubtful whether full (not to talk of fair) elections could be held in the Maoist-affected districts.

The Maoist People's War has radically altered the balance of political power within Nepal, and by implication, called into question the entire political and economic development strategy of the country. The issue is not



Left to right: Vice-Chairman of Thawang VDC, Kalam Rokka (Nepali Congress), portering in Libang; Bhim Kumari Budha of Jagriti; Man Kumari Pun, wife of Maoist 'martyr' Comrade Kshiriji; and ex-Gorkha Hasta Muni Pun.

Continued from page 1

At the entrance to the village, local cadre are marking Martyr's Day with the inauguration of a memorial gate. Even the Maoists have not been able to resist the Nepali penchant for building ceremonial gates at every opportunity. This one is a tribute to the 41 Maoists who have died in Rolpa in the five years of Peoples' War. "The blood of the martyrs has not been shed in vain," says 22-year-old Man Kumari Pun, a member of the Maoist Mahila Sangathan (women's organisation). "I mourn the loss of my husband, but this is not a time for sentiment. It's a time to transform sorrow into strength." Man Kumari has a five-year old son, and she is self-confident and forceful: "If the need arises, I can pick up a gun. My husband died but there are thousands to take his place. We shall continue the war against dictatorship. We are fighting the *nokarshahi pujipati barga, pratikryabadi kukurharu*." That is the party-line for "bureaucratic capitalist class and reactionary dogs".

Man Kumari is one of hundreds of local women in the militia that is 20 percent women. Many other women are active in the Mahila Sangathan. Comrade Barsha is one of them. "I don't have to carry a gun," she tells us. Seated amidst a group of women, who shade themselves against the hot afternoon sun with towels, Comrade Barsha and her colleagues wait for others to arrive for the opening of a memorial gate. "We used to be restricted to the household, the revolution has made women aware of our rights to education, property, to equal treatment." The Nepal Human Development Report ranks mid-Western districts like Rolpa as the least gender-sensitive in the country. Talking to women like Comrade Barsha, it is obvious this will now change.

It is hard to tell, when there is so much revolutionary talk around, what the silent majority really thinks. There are those who just want to live quietly, and if any of them had dissident thoughts, you don't hear them. Hasta Muni Pun is 57, and as an ex-Gurkha soldier in the Indian Army, he has seen it all. He tells us: "I don't want to die, so I do what they say."

Hasta Muni is a Nepali Congress supporter, and one of very few who returned to his home village from the safety of Libang after the Maoists spread the word that no one would be harmed. But the message is clear—you won't be harmed as long as you behave yourselves, so not too many have taken up on the offer. Hasta Muni is keen to talk, and his suppressed feelings well out: "I have seen war. You can't gain power without war. There will be a war. People will die. Villagers will die. Both the police and the Maoists threaten, and subdue the people." Hasta Muni's wife looks worried that her husband is talking too much and cautions him to keep quiet.

Most other Nepali Congress supporters haven't dared return to their villages and are refugees in Libang, making a living breaking stones and working as porters. The district headquarters is secured by a 200-strong police force and an army battalion has been brought in as part of the government's effort to increase security after the attack on Dunai in September. But even Libang is not safe enough for Bhim Kumari Buda who is followed by police bodyguards wherever she goes. Bhim Kumari is in the Maoists' most-wanted list in Rolpa, accused of being an informant blamed for the deaths of more than a dozen of their comrades. "It's certain death if I return. But I refuse to surrender to them, or to pay them any insurance money," says Bhim Kumari. A staunch Nepali Congress supporter, she heads Jagriti, a women's empowerment programme (reportedly) set up by the government to provide relief to displaced Nepali Congress supporters.

For Rolpa district judge Nilkantha Upadhyay, the surface calm is deceptive: "Hidden behind the peace, I think they are building up their

strength. There's a silent terror." Upadhyay, like many government officials languishing in Libang, has time on his hands. His court doesn't get too many cases after the formation of Maoist People's Court and parallel government. The Peoples' Court metes out stern justice for practices like polygamy which is prevalent in these districts. Alcoholics are punished, and Rolpa is nearly dry. Village drunkards have sobered up.

Health workers, water supply and agricultural technicians, however, still have jobs to do and are tolerated by the Maoists. Says Rishi Ram Bhandari, an agricultural expert who has worked in Rolpa for the past 12 years: "Farming hasn't been affected. The people seek advice regarding farming, seeds and crops, even for their community farms," says Bhandari. Before the fighting began, Rolpa and the neighbouring district of Rukum used to be known as the vegetable "seed banks" for the rest of Nepal, exporting up to Rs 20 million worth. That has been reduced to a trickle. Health is faring almost as badly. Even before the insurgency flared, Rolpa ranked 60th out of Nepal's 75 districts in human development with an average lifespan of 52, and an infant mortality rate of 130—much worse than the national average. Seeing the need, the Maoists have allowed government health officials to work in Rolpa. "As long as they're convinced that we're not informers, they allow us to carry out our work," says health official Chitra Jung Shahi.

Even so, fighting has driven off many others, and only half the 200 health personnel posts are filled. Even before it began functioning, the district hospital in Reuwei, an hour's walk from Libang is derelict and abandoned, a symbol of corruption, mismanagement and neglect. The nearest hospital is in Dang, two days' walk away. Women volunteers continue to carry out anti-polio vaccination, and Vitamin A programmes. But the general health conditions haven't seen any dramatic improvement.

The Maoist have also disbanded a women's savings credit scheme by warning off local activists supported by foreign funds. Maoists looted the papers of the savings group and sent back development officers with stern warnings. "It was a necessary step," says Comrade Ajay, a former school teacher and going by his bearings, a fairly senior district leader. "Such programmes, entirely foreign funded, undermine the People's War."

The Maoists may mete out free justice, support local households, and build bridges, but they acknowledge that it will need much more to address the people's demand for development. Comrade Ajay continues: "Development is necessary for the people here. But it has to encourage self-reliance and be free from foreign funding which encourages corruption and parasitic tendencies." He is critical of road projects like the highway currently being built from Libang to Madichaur by the army. "This road is not being built with the people in mind. It will make it easier for the government to infiltrate into our stronghold," says Comrade Ajay. But so far, they have allowed the road to go ahead because they don't want to risk taking on the army.

While some in Madichaur are wholly committed to the cause, others keep a low profile, and try to figure out which way the wind is blowing. At the moment it is blowing in the direction of revolution. Comrade Ajay and his colleagues are confident that the people are with them, and they will be patient about waiting for their fight to result in better living standards. He gives us a parting thought: "Every year the people's trust is growing. If we continue to be honest and stick to our ideals, they will come over to our side. Yesterday, we didn't have much. Today we've grown, we have an army, a system."



by PITAMBER SHARMA



The issue is not whether the Maoists will prevail, it is whether questions of equity and social justice can continue to be ignored.

whether the Maoists will prevail, the issue is whether the questions—of equity and social justice, of access to resources and opportunities for better livelihoods—that they have raised can continue to be ignored. One may disagree with the Maoist methods of “revolution”, but it is hard to disagree with the legitimacy of the questions that have been raised. The on-going squabble and stalemate in the national legislature makes an interesting, and indeed ironic contrast to the larger ramifications of the Maoist People’s War for the prevailing political, economic and social status quo in Nepal.

economic exclusion and exploitation also needs to be addressed. The creation of the armed police force signifies a fumbling resolve to meet force by force. This can only lead to the perpetration of violence at a much larger and intensified scale. It conveniently sidesteps the central issue of the need for a deeper structural change in the body politic. There is political procrastination and bankruptcy in economic policies and programmes. This is hardly surprising in a government wedded to market reforms, indiscriminate liberalisation, and “mobilisation”

championing the cause of the underclass, the poor, the deprived and the dispossessed. “Societal transformation” has been their main ideological plank. They want Nepali nationalism strengthened to withstand the onslaught of “Indian expansionism”. But all these points are central also to the Maoist agenda, and one would have expected a fitting response to Maoist extremism from the political left, a response that would go beyond the rhetoric, and outline an alternative political and economic agenda and actions to achieve those ends. Instead, the left political parties have proved to be dumb, confused spectators caught between friend and foe.

If any political formation in Nepal has the capability to pull the carpet from under the feet of the Maoists, it is the organised left with its roots in civil society. That capability has to derive from a clear understanding of the possibilities of structural change within a democratic system. Such a political, economic and social agenda and programme would provide the basis for political action both within and outside parliament. This would, of course, demand a return to a politics based on ideology, a commodity rare in Nepali left politics today.

The Maoist People’s War has fundamentally questioned the credibility of Nepal’s mainstream left. It is doubtful whether a dialogue devoid of an economic and political agenda would really contribute much to the resolution of the Maoist insurrection, and it would be up to the left political parties to make a singular contribution by negotiating such an agenda, and bringing the nation back from the brink of a civil war in which there would be no winners. ♦

(Pitamber Sharma a former professor of geography at Tribhuvan University.)



Maoist martyrs' gate at entrance to Madichaur

The government’s response to the Maoist insurgency, instead of bringing a paradigm shift in development thinking—political, economic and social—has not been serious, not constructive, and not innovative. The debate the Maoist People’s War should have initiated within ruling circles has unfortunately been limited to the search for a symptomatic rather than a systemic treatment of the issue. The violence and terror perpetrated by Maoists as well as the government forces need to be deplored and all effort needs to be made to end it. But the “quiet and sustained violence” endured by Nepalis because of degrading poverty, of inhuman corruption of political, social and

and “empowerment” of communities under the “benign” watchful eyes and guiding hands of the donors; the Maoist insurgency is simply a meaningless irritant in the otherwise smooth road to capitalist “development”. Clearly, even the mindset to deal with the crisis is absent.

Left out Unfortunately, it is the response of the moderate left to the Maoist People’s War that has been the most enigmatic. They have consistently called for “structural changes in the political and economic system”, and, at least in theory, the left has remained vocal in the struggle for a society free of exploitation, and in

LETTERS

GREAT PLOUGHMAN The announcement of Prachanda Path, the ‘new’ ideological lodestar of our insurgent Maoists, can be construed to mean a number of different things. Firstly, at a more prosaic level, it can be seen as a blatant attempt to put a fresh, nationalistic spin into what undeniably remains a tired, imported revolutionary model. Secondly, it can be interpreted as a shrewd move towards what Umberto Eco calls a ‘semiological guerrilla warfare’. Given the tragic association of Maoism in the past century with such monumental follies as the ‘great leap forward’ and the ‘cultural revolution’, our Maoist high command’s desire to sanitise their bloody insurgency through a clever piece of semiological/linguistic surgery is understandable. But more interestingly, Prachanda Path is perhaps a highly ambitious bid of Chairman Prachanda to ascend Red Olympus and rub shoulders with the likes of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

History tells us that the apotheosis of Communist leaders is generally accompanied by an embarrassment of epithetic riches.



A classic example is provided by Pico Iyer, who, during his visit to North Korea in 1990, discovered that the great leader Kim Il Sung was not just a ‘great comrade, great man and fighter’ to his people, but also a ‘great thinker, politician and strategist...a great man and father of the people...the sun of the

nation...peerless patriot and national hero...all-triumphant, resolute and incomparable leader...eminent Marxist-Leninist and outstanding military strategist’.

‘Prachanda’ is already a rather flattering *nom de guerre* of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, whose own canonisation as signaled by the announcement of the ideological offshoot deserves a special epithetic celebration. At the moment, I can think of only one epithet—one that has the added virtue of resonating with Hindu mythological connotations—capable of doing justice to his newfound, homegrown greatness: The Great Ploughman. Can you think of others?

Ram Limbu
Sydney

TIBET

As a Nepali citizen of Tibetan origin, I have seen our government showing growing intolerance towards Tibetans

living in Nepal. At last week’s Tibetan New Year police tried to stop the celebrations at Baudhanath. While in the past the government has bowed to pressure from China to curtail political activities of Tibetans, this is the first time they have tried to stop a cultural New Year’s celebration. Activities such as tossing barely flour in the air, dances, Buddhist prayers and rituals, speeches by prominent members of the Tibetan community, and the installation of a temporary shrine with the Dalai Lama’s photo displayed were forbidden.

It is very disheartening that we have to face such treatment in a democratic Nepal. In the last few months even traditional dances in schools and halls have been called off. What harm can a dance do? I sincerely hope that the government will be more tolerant in future and change its attitude. We have lived in peace in Nepal and there is no reason to harass us when we are celebrating a cultural event.

Tenzing Jigme Tuladhar
Kathmandu

CORRECTION

In the special section on Thamel (#32) the proprietor of the Good Earth Bookstore is Swaroop Singh Basnet and not a Newari poet as erroneously stated. -Ed

Hits FM

Sharing the load



Sal Bahadur Rai rests his load on a tokma and surveys the Arun Valley where his village Diding lies; and, facing page, delicately negotiates a Nepali-style stile.

SALIL SUBEDI

The trekking season has begun, and climbers and trekkers from all over the world have made for the mountains of Nepal equipped with hi-tech trekking gear, professional medical advice and plenty of insurance. But whether they are out on a "tea-house" trek or an organised one, little will they know or be informed about the state of their humble companions—the porters.

Trekking porters carry their *bhari* in all sorts of climates and terrain, with sparse clothing, footwear like flip-flops and plastic bags as protection from the snow. With the *bhari* supported on the bent 50-degree switchback of the spine, the porters clutch the

namlo—a tumpline, distributing the load over the vertebrae and neck muscles, calves and thighs, and heave their way along. It is known that this style of haulage goes back 15,000 years in time, long before pulleys, levers and wheels were invented.

Locally known as *bhariya*, the porters in the Himalaya, men and women, are at the moment lifting loads exceeding 60 kg and transporting that for 7 hours at an average of Rs 80 per day. "People say it's a tough job. But one has to make a living," says 38-year-old Dhunja Tamang of Dhading, a freelance porter (as opposed to the staff porters of trekking agencies) for over 15 years. This ancient practice of hauling and transporting goods is a pointer to the state of the economy in this part

of the world.

Porters in the Himalaya suffer four times as many accidents and illnesses as a Western trekker. In case of a fall or sickness on the trail, a porter's life is at risk. "The group just abandons us. We have to walk all the way back without any help, and often only with partial payment," says Dhuni Maya Tamang of Dhading.

So far, insurance for porters is virtually non-existent. During natural calamities at high altitudes, porters' chances of survival, or even getting compensation for injury or mutilated body parts, are low. "A direct helicopter rescue of a single person costs up to \$2,200. You can easily understand why porters become the ill-fated ones," says Prakash Adhikary, chief executive of the Himalayan

Rescue Association of Nepal (HRA) and the Nepal representative of the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

The IPPG, a volunteer-based advocacy organisation run by mountain specialists and workers from around the world, has laid out five guidelines on how to keep porters safe (*See box*). The HRA at its two aid-posts at Pheriche (4,200m) and Manang (3,500m) provides medical facilities to porters and trekking staff at a minimum consultation charge of Rs 50. "But most of the time we waive the fee for porters," says Adhikary.

There are no official estimates about the number of porters, and certainly no way of knowing how many people have died or gone

missing while portering. During the freak storm of 1995 in the Nepali Himalaya, 42 Nepalis were officially declared dead, and many more are believed to have perished. "Cases like this have occurred time and again. But there has been no official effort so far to record them and compensate relatives for their loss," says Adhikary. Trekking agencies say that claiming a dead porter means a lot of hassle, so they don't report what is after all only replaceable manpower.

Industry sources put the ratio of trekkers to porters is 1:2 for the average 100,000 trekkers who visit Nepal every year. Trekking agencies hire porters at random every trekking season and very few agencies have staff porters. But even they are employed on a daily wage basis. Individual travellers also hire freelance porters along the trekking trail. "Most freelance porters are simple villagers. For decent money they often carry excess weight, which is hazardous," says Parsuram Dhungel, a trekking porter in his mid-twenties from Sankhuwasabha.

The major concern for porters and porter activists is safety, the elimination of exploitation and support for such measures from all concerned parties. So far, there has been no direct support from the government, and national planners have traditionally underestimated this socio-economic enterprise. However, Nepali law states that provisions should be made for the security of trekking porters, they should be provided with personal protective equipment including shoes and clothes depending on the weather, and that the management (employer) is responsible for their rescue when required.

"Law? After one trek, the next thing we have to do is look desperately for another trip. Otherwise we will be in a terrible situation, without money. If we had good laws we wouldn't be facing such problems," says another trekking porter Chandra Bahadur Tamang from Dolakha. Porters have little



SHARAD RANJIT

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

An ill wind from the West

Without excusing the reprehensible vandalism of the Taliban, one wonders about the hypocrisy and the incompetence of Western leaders.

Another round of outrage from the "international community", this time over the admittedly dreadful acts against the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan, by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Taliban apologists are telling us that the destruction is an act of defiance, even helplessness, in the face of international sanctions that are largely hurting poor Afghans. This is a spurious argument, but I do have serious problems with the way "the west" handles those it perceives as its enemies.

Set to one side the very real vandalism going on now in Afghanistan in the name of a Prophet who probably would not have allowed the statues' destruction since they aren't being worshipped by anyone. Set aside the powerful and understandable grief among scholars and the world's Buddhists, not least in Nepal. But am I alone here in detecting a note of hypocrisy from the United States and some other protesting voices. I also wonder if the verbiage doesn't conceal a deep political incompetence among the current crop of western leaders when faced with a powerful challenge abroad.

First the hypocrisy. A Nepali friend who works to improve the lot of women put it to me succinctly and savagely. "The Bush administration in Washington is worse than the Taliban," she declared. "The Afghans are



smashing statues and forcing women back into the medieval times. But that's out of ignorance and fanaticism." She reminded me how President Bush Jr took office in January and immediately imposed a ban on American overseas aid money to going to family planning or women's health groups that have anything at all to do with abortion. "With that, he condemned how many thousands, how many hundreds of thousands of poor women to die at the hands of back street butchers. And why did he do it? Is he opposed to abortion? Maybe, but why doesn't he have the guts to ban it in his own country? Why does he pick on our poor women?" She has a point that must be put to Mr Bush.

Then there's the role of the west in encouraging radical Islamic behaviour in modern Afghanistan to serve a redoubt against Soviet expansionism in the hottest days of the Cold War. All the warring mujahideen groups, whose internecine squabbling led to the rise of the Taliban in the first place, got encouragement, money and weapons from Washington, London and the rest. As for the Taliban, they were supported, at least subtly, in their early days in those same Western capitals, ostensibly because they brought an element of peace to a battered Afghan countryside, in reality because that

western petroleum interests stood to make money from the construction of a gas pipeline from Central Asia to Pakistan. The international posturings and occasional actions of our Globo-cops in Washington, London et al have got us precisely nowhere in almost every intervention that they've undertaken. Was it the relentless bombing of Serbia by NATO planes in the late 1990s that toppled Slobodan Milosevic and his corrupt and evil regime? No, it was a Jana Andolan, Serb-style, followed by free and fair elections. Meanwhile, his democratic successors have a shattered country to rebuild and a growing problem with Albanian gangsters in the UN-protected enclave of Kosovo, fuelling world demand for arms, drugs and contraband. Mark my words, Slobodan, or his much worse counterparts on the fascist right, could well be back. As for Saddam Hussein, he's still there, having outlasted two, possibly three, British Prime Ministers and similar number of American presidents. True, George Bush Sr did see his son beat Uday Hussein to high office. But that's only yet another mark of how the outrage of the "international community" has enhanced the status of yet another evil dictator.

None of this is to excuse even one iota the behaviour of the Taliban. They have done wrong, and destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas is reprehensible. Equally, I refuse to accept that the self-righteous words of Bush, Clinton or Blair, can mask their own countries' responsibility for the demons their countries may once have helped create, and have certainly sustained with their hatred and opposition. ♦



Preventing illness and accidents

The higher and more remote your trek, the better equipment and shelter you have to provide, especially in winter. The International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) recommends the following guidelines:

- That adequate clothing be available for protection in bad weather and at altitude. This should include adequate footwear, hat, gloves, windproof jacket and trousers, sunglasses and access to blanket and pad above the snowline.
- That leaders and trekkers provide the same standard of medical care for porters, as they would expect for themselves.
- That porters not be paid off because of illness without the leader or trekkers being informed.
- That sick porters never be sent down alone, but with someone who speaks their language and understands the problem.
- That sufficient funds be provided to sick porters to cover the cost of their land rescue and treatment.

More on <www.ippg.net>



bargaining power, as supply is usually greater than demand. Agencies hiring porters normally tend to put porters on the defensive by threatening to fire them should they demand more than the price set by the group or agency. Though portering is the backbone of the trekking industry and a life support system for thousands of Nepali families, there's no organisation or union of porters—they don't even have the time to come together and talk. By its nature, portering doesn't allow co-workers to sit in one place and talk things over. However, the Trekking Worker's Association of Nepal (TWAN) does raise issues concerning porters and other trekking workers. Women join portering as an

escape from drudgery and discriminatory wages back in the village. "I have four kids and three are in school. I took a long break of nine years to look after my kids. Now I plan to go and carry loads because I need money to support my kids," says 30-year-old Titi Maya Tamang from Shertung in Dhading, whose husband is also a trekking porter. Portering might be one of the few enterprises where women and men receive equal pay. But they are not free from sexual harassment from the *sirdars*. "What can you do? Sometimes you see your own sister or wife being verbally harassed by the guides and *sirdars*. But because they are our employers we can't really be rude to them," says Chandra Bahadur Tamang

from Dolakha. Porter-related issues are moving into the limelight, though, and things are happening since the first ever conference on porters was organised six years ago by the Himal Association ("Hard Livelihood: Conference on the Himalayan Porter"). A series of conferences have been organised by the IPPG and a photo exhibition held last autumn. A calendar has been published portraying the life of a porter (from which the pictures accompanying this article have been taken). Recently, 35 porters gathered in the capital to share their experiences and needs at a two-day workshop jointly organised by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in association with the IPPG, called the "Sustainable Tourism Training Workshop for Trekking Porters." The workshop exposed participating porters to ways of tackling their problems, informed them on issues related to mountain tourism, as well as their safety on treks. "We are trying to educate porters. Portering should evolve as professional work and porters given their dignity and rights," says Tara Gurung, Senior Conservation Officer of ACAP. "Since portering is an important part of the Nepali economy, we encourage travellers to employ porters and support the tradition. But that doesn't mean porters have to be exploited, like is happening at large in the country," she adds. "What I like is that things are in motion. Attitudes are changing, people are talking and doing something to tackle the present situation of porters," says Ben Ayers, the IPPG USA representative and coordinator of the Porter Clothing Bank—a non-profit initiative to lend donated mountain wear to porters. Although modern transport—Tata trucks, Russian jeeps, Canadian Twin Otters and the Mi-17 helicopters—and porter-friendly suspension bridges (which have been used a great deal by yaks and mules transporting goods at cheaper rates) are now available, porters still show their strength and daring. Nepali porters are praised the world over for their efforts, their daring feats, and in surviving the harshest of conditions. It is said that if portering were an Olympic endurance weight lifting event, the Nepali porter would win all the medals. ♦

Arterial sclerosis

Last monsoon, a landslide at Krishnabhir on the Prithvi Highway cut the capital off from the rest of the country for two weeks. Experts now say even one downpour can trigger off a bigger landslide, disabling Kathmandu's supply-route for weeks. Krishnabhir, 82 km west of Kathmandu, has already seen landslides after last week's rainfall. A stretch is covered with mud and debris, and the bulldozer deployed to clear the highway is of little use due to continued slippage from the hills. Closer to Kathmandu, 50m of Paryabhir, near Malekhu, Dhading also experienced landslides earlier this week. Last monsoon, the government promised to build two protection walls along the Krishnabhir section of the Prithvi Highway, one 180 m long, 6 m wide, and another, 40 m long and 5 m wide. There has been no work as yet on the project. Maintenance workers of the Department of Roads at Krishnabhir say it will take another two months to clear the mud and debris—two months before they can start building those walls.

Kofi Annan comes to Nepal

UN General Secretary Kofi Annan's last-minute decision to visit Nepal on a two-day tour 12-13 March is being interpreted as a diplomatic success. The government expects Annan's tour to give a push to its proposal to develop the Kavre-based UN Training Centre into a UN Regional Peacekeeping Centre. Annan's visit to the training centre comes on the heels of other high-profile visits, by Mongolian president Natsagiin Bagabandi, Chinese defence minister General Chi Haotian, and British defence minister Geoffrey Hoon. Before Nepali soldiers go on peacekeeping duty overseas, they are trained at the centre at Kavre for six months with counterparts from foreign armed forces. If Annan's visit provides the hoped-for impetus to transform the Kavre training centre into a peacekeeping centre, Nepal will soon host a Multi-Platoon Training Exercise. The Ministry of Defence in Kathmandu says 625 Nepali soldiers are serving in the UN force in Lebanon, 225 in East Timor, and a few others in places like Kosovo or Congo as observers. There are also over 100 Nepali police personnel serving in UN-related missions. The number deployed is significantly down from about the all-time high of 2,400 in 1995. Nepal first sent soldiers on peacekeeping duty in 1958 to Lebanon, three years after Nepal joined the UN.



No Indian meat and fish

Europe isn't the only place anxious about diseased livestock. Eastern Nepal, too, is worried in the wake of about 100 deaths last week due to an unidentified animal-borne disease in neighbouring Siliguri, 38 km east of Kakarvitta. Bordering towns in east Nepal have banned import of meat and fish from India. Damak Municipality was the first to impose the ban, followed by Ilam, Mechi, Biratnagar, Kakarvitta, Dhulabari, Itahari and Dharan municipalities. Outlets selling imported meat and fish will be fined up to Rs 15,000. The fears seem to be valid. Nepal lacks facilities to diagnose the blue tongue disease, suspected to have affected animals in Siliguri. For now, Nepal is to rely on reports of Indian laboratories for identifying the cause of death. Blue tongue is communicable, attacks liver and kidneys and can kill animals within 36 hours. Humans are vulnerable, too, through consumption of contaminated meat, and if not treated properly the disease takes only 36 hours to kill a person. Hill towns like Ilam have also banned meat from tarai districts like Jhapa and Morang, due to fears that meat and fish could be contaminated due to their proximity to Siliguri. Residents of Jhapa, Sunsari and Morang regularly shop for cheaper goods in Indian towns like Jogbani and Siliguri. The ban has received a mixed response from locals, but meat sellers in Biratnagar sub-metropolis pressurised the local authority to revise its total ban and check imports only. According to the Morang Meat Association, Biratnagar alone consumes 110 quintals of meat products a day, worth Rs 1.7 million. "There is no need to panic yet," assures Pravin Shakya, meat specialist with Third Livestock Development Project at the Department of Agriculture. The government says that the blue tongue disease has not travelled to Nepal yet, but without laboratory facilities to confirm the disease and a proper mechanism to check import of diseased animals the claim is feeble. Government statistics show that Nepal relies on Indian imports for 90 percent of the buffalo meat and 75 percent of goat meat consumed annually.

Third party for verification

Four international human rights organisations working with the Nepal-Bhutan joint verification team at the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal have demanded the involvement of a third party, particularly the UN High Commission for Refugees. The four rights INGOs—Human Rights Watch, Lutheran World Federation, Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and Refugees International—are consultants to the UN. Together with the Centre for Protection of Minorities and Against Racism and Discrimination in Bhutan (CEMRAD-Bhutan) they have forwarded their recommendations to the Nepali and Bhutanese foreign ministers. They said that the initiation of the joint verification process has brought a sense of "hope and optimism" to refugees awaiting repatriation. But they expressed concern that various Bhutanese rights groups working in the camp areas are being pressurised to refrain from activism. The groups suggested that the presence of international monitoring bodies like the UNHCR was important to carry out verification in accordance with international standards and to uphold the rights of approximately 100,000 Bhutanese in the camps.

Spring climbing

Twenty-two mountaineering teams have been permitted to climb in the Nepali Himalaya this spring although more teams are expected to join as the climbing season progresses. Nepal's Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation has permitted ten expeditions, including two Indian expeditions to climb Everest (8848m) by the normal southeast ridge. Baba Munindra Pal, an Indian national without a leg will attempt to climb Everest. Leader of the 7-member Handicapped Expedition 2001 India, Pal will attempt to reach the summit by May 31 when the climbing season ends. A 12-member Indian Army expedition led by Col SC Sharma will also attempt Everest while Biviane Cuo will lead the first Chilean women's expedition to the peak, the Ministry of Tourism says. Apart from the Indian and Chilean teams, three American, two Spanish and one expedition each from Japan and Germany will attempt the 8848m peak. The Ministry has permitted five teams to climb Makalu (8463m), 4 teams to climb Amadablam (6812m), one team each to Himlung (7126m), Kantega (6779m), and to Mansalu (8163m).

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The craft of graft

TULSI DAS MAHARJAN

(Translated from *Mulyankan*)

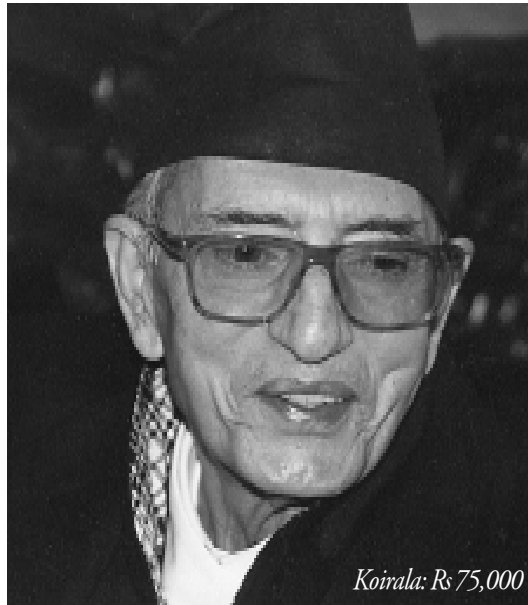
After Girija Prasad Koirala became prime minister for the first time in 1991, he formed a one-member committee to provide financial assistance to all political sufferers under the Panchayat regime. Two-time prime minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, was the sole member of this committee called the Committee to Provide Financial Help to Political Sufferers. By declaring himself a political sufferer, Bhattarai withdrew Rs 75,000 from this committee's fund. When Bhattarai was prime minister last year, Prime Minister Koirala also received Rs 75,000. Other leaders of the Congress, the late Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, Ram Chandra Poudel and others also received Rs 75,000 each. Congress leaders who received lesser amounts number in the hundreds.

It is not only Congress leaders who benefited from this fund. Leaders from all major parties have at some time or the other received cash from this fund. The late Man Mohan Adhikari (CPN-UML), KP Oli (UML), Modnath Prasit (UML), Pradip Nepal (UML) and Radha Krishna Mainali (ML), all received Rs 75,000 each, while Jhala Nath Khanal (UML), Amrit Bohara (UML), Madhav Kumar Nepal (UML), Ishwor Pokharel (UML), Keshab Badaal (UML), Bharat Mohan Adhikary (UML), CP Mainali (ML), Hiranya Lal Shrestha (ML), Lok Krishna Bhattarai, Narayan Dhakal (UML) and Devendra Lal Shrestha received Rs 50,000. Lila Mani Pokhrel (United People's Front) received Rs 30,000 from this fund.

When the committee was formed by cabinet decision in 1991, it did not lay out any parameters



Bhattarai: Rs 75,000



Koirala: Rs 75,000

The treasury is being looted in the name of the politically repressed, and all parties are guilty.

but that it was to disburse financial assistance to everyone who had suffered under the Panchayat regime. This meant that the sole member of this committee, Bhattarai, could provide financial help to anyone at his own discretion. Anyone close to the committee member could benefit financially. In the very first year the committee distributed Rs 15 million.

In the middle of 1992, the cabinet drew up guidelines for the committee, and expanded it to include two others: Omkar Prasad Shrestha of the Nepali Congress and CP Mainali of the then-UML. The same year it was decided that the tenure of committee members would be three years. In 1994, the cabinet decided to extend the committee's life by another year. After the mid-term elections that year, the UML formed the government, and the members of the committee were replaced. Nar Bahadur Khand became the chief, Mitharam Sharma,

the ex-officio member secretary, with Sushil Pyakurel and Rajesh Gautam as the members.

The UML-led government was toppled after nine months and a new committee announced. The Congress-Rastriya Prajatantra Party government once again went for a one-man committee with Bhattarai heading it. The committee was to wind up its work by 2 May, 2000, but it seems the committee is still functioning, and still in the process of emptying the national treasury and helping out all its near and dear financially.

Who can benefit?

The committee decided that help would be provided in two forms—primary financial help, and a lumpsum amount. A primary amount of Rs 3,000 is given to anyone who had been jailed for three years, or in exile or underground for a total of seven years, while Rs 5,000 is provided to those

sentenced for life, or jailed continuously for 10 years. Close relatives of people murdered for political reasons would also receive a primary sum of Rs 5,000. However, this was stopped after 1995, by which time 2,244 people had received assistance totalling Rs 7.5 million.

According to the new guidelines, it was decided that the families of political sufferers who were murdered would get a lumpsum of Rs 100,000, people jailed for over 7 years continuously would get a lumpsum of Rs 75,000, people jailed for 5 to 7 years continuously would get Rs 50,000, people jailed for 3 to 5 years continuously would get Rs 30,000. If the jail sentence was not continuous, people jailed for over 7 years would get a lumpsum of Rs 50,000, while those jailed for between 5 and 7 would get Rs 30,000 and between 3 and 5 years would get Rs 20,000. People in exile or underground for a minimum

of seven years would get a lumpsum of Rs 50,000. As of mid-July, 2000, a total of Rs 150 million had been distributed to 3,268 people.

Who qualifies?

After the 1950-51 revolution, a similar committee had been formed in 1956 to provide help to people who had been persecuted for their political beliefs. The five categories of sufferers were:

- 1) families of people murdered by the Rana regime and who were financially devastated;
- 2) people disabled while fighting against the Rana regime;
- 3) people killed fighting the Rana regime;
- 4) people who fell ill while fighting the Rana regime and who were in a bad financial situation; and
- 5) people who had to give up their education, their business or jobs because of the fight against the Rana regime and were still affiliated or active in politics.

The main point that has to be noted is that all people who fell in the above categories had to be from a very weak financial background, meaning that they had to be very, very poor. The Bhattarai committee provides help to all people who suffered under the Panchayat regime irrespective of their financial situation. This means that even rich people qualify for money from the fund. This is where the trouble lies.

It is all right if the government and the committee provide financial help to political sufferers who lost everything in their fight for democracy. People who have no money, are downtrodden, and have no means of surviving should be provided financial help. In fact it is the duty of the government to help these people, but not people who suffered but are rich enough to fend

for themselves. If money is given to these financially well-off people, this becomes some sort of a business. Did these rich political sufferers fight for democracy to gain financially in the long run? Were they really serious in their fight or did they fight because they could make money later on? Did they fight for their own selfish greed and not for the sake of democracy?

The 1956 committee defined "sufferers", much more clearly in that all people who suffered under the Rana regime and were financially weak, could qualify for money. The committee of 1991 does not differentiate on the basis of the financial status of sufferers, and states that anyone who has suffered will get financial help. This means that rich people who suffered in some way, even if they do not require it, can get financial assistance from this committee. The financial help such people take is in fact pocket money for them.

Again the 1991 committee is silent on people disabled in the fight for democracy in 1990. Take the case of Tara Khadka of Rukum. On 6 April, 1990, the police fired upon a crowd demonstrating for democracy at Darbar Marg and he was injured in the left leg. As he did not have enough money, he did not get proper treatment. He now lives in a social centre run by St Xavier's and has no relatives to look after him. He is now leading a hard life. His left leg has been amputated. He did not go to jail but sacrificed a lot for the country. But under the present committee's categorisation, Khadka does not qualify for compensation in any way.

Khadka says that he has already applied many times to the committee, in fact he has

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS

Promising everything to those who have nothing



My friend arrived for lunch the other day, pink with indignation. "You know I counted 24 obnoxious oversized billboards between Patan and your house. There were no billboards when I was here 20 years ago. It was so beautiful then, you could see the Himalaya from practically every part of Kathmandu."

He is right, of course. Somehow, living here, we tend to overlook the ugliness and it takes a visitor to offer perspective. Where can one cast one's eyes in Kathmandu anymore without being exposed to vulgarity, and crass commercialisation. Why should

tourists visit a city that is a garbage-ridden imitation of Times Square? Kathmandu's beautiful old brick walls are saturated with exhortations to buy buy. There is scarcely a house or a wall left undefiled along the streets. This vulgar defacing merges and blurs with the ugliness all around and happily disappears from the consciousness. (Which is probably not what the products' promoters intended.)

Coating these old brick walls with hideous commercials would be declared a criminal offence in any other country. But even if it was a criminal offence here, it would still be

Will the wrath of the gods wreak revenge on the people of this sacred Valley for sullyng it with prurient billboards?

flouted—like the zoning laws, the building codes and all the other regulations we have. So they have proliferated unchecked, with the Bagmati Bridge area into Patan turning into one big phalanx of billboards—most of them for alcoholic drinks of various sorts. Even Darbar Marg is not spared—a large hoarding that soars at its northern end vies with the silhouette of the Royal Palace.

One of the worst offshoots of capitalism is the visual hideousness it leaves in its wake. The free-for-all market unleashes unbridled consumerism and wastage of which advertisements symbolise the greed, avarice and desire to own more of everything. The problem is that most of what is advertised is out of reach and unattainable by most pedestrians and commuters in the streets below. Growing up in the USA, I avoided buying anything that's advertised. It was a useless personal statement, but a statement nevertheless. All my life I have avoided supermarkets, preferring

the family-run corner shops. Supermarkets offer so much choice that one stands paralysed, unable to make up one's mind.

Why do we need 35 brands of soap and 10 different kinds of beer? There has to be some competition, but this is overdoing choice. Why should the world's second poorest country cater to the whims of the maybe one percent nouveau riche, instead of producing affordable, cheap, and wholesome consumer products and medicines?

I miss the good old days when there was no choice. If you wanted beer there was Star and it was good enough. If you stuck to soft drinks there were squashes and fresh lemon: choice enough. Why did democracy have to become an excuse to deface every available wall and roof of this once-grand town with ads for products that only the rich can afford? Why does the government which took the big step to ban liquor and cigarette advertising from radio and television (because they are bad for

the health) allow them on huge hoardings all over the Valley? Are the health risks confined to only those who can afford television sets? These hoardings promise everything to those who have nothing. The manipulative depictions of fancy whiskeys with westernised women in suggestive poses aimed at people who can't afford them.

Areas under Maoist control are dry. This has been one of their most appreciated programmes. People have to pay a Maoist tax, but they praise the anti-alcohol drive. Nepali women who used to be beaten by drunken husbands, and forced to see their children go hungry because the grain meant to feed children was distilled into raksi are all praise for the Maoist prohibition.

While tourists complain, and the rest of us wear blinders, the Kathmandu elite glides under these hoardings in their four-wheel drives past streets choked with smoke and festooned with billboards. Advertisements for various

accoutrements and libations obliterate the moon, the stars and most of the sky, as well as the only bits of eye-soothing green still remaining in Kathmandu. Visitors to Nepal are shocked that Kathmandu is so disfigured by billboards. Wonder what UNESCO, which was once reconsidering its decision to have Kathmandu on the list of World Heritage Sites, would think of the burgeoning billboards in this town of historical treasure. How has a valley that was an Asian gem been allowed to deteriorate into a modern Sodom and Gomorrah? Those who hide behind the humble socialist philosophy of BP Koirala show little love for preserving Nepali culture, history, and this once gleaming and universally admired emerald Valley. So, like the Biblical retribution, will there be "fire and brimstone" here too to punish us for our callousness? Will the wrath of the gods wreak revenge on the people of this sacred Valley for sullyng it with prurience? We could buy time by tearing down the billboards and giving our town some breathing space. ♦



appealed to them so many times that the people working in that office always tell him that he does not qualify in any way and therefore will not be eligible to receive any money. Instead they are rude to him and tell him to go and beg in Ratna Park, maybe he will get some money there. According to him, he has so far received only Rs 3,000 from the committee, that too when the UML was in government.

There are many people like Khadka who have not received any help from the committee. All because they are not affiliated to a given political party or because they do not fall into any of the categories as made by the committee. It seems most of the people who have received any

all he could to work against the movement. After the restoration of democracy he presented false statements to the committee, got himself certified as having spent more than seven years in prison and collected Rs 50,000 as compensation.

Another person who presented false statements seems to be Prime Minister Koirala. The official papers published by the committee mention the period spent by the present PM in jail but these do not add up to seven years. Yet he took Rs 75,000. Everyone knows that he is a rich man and does not need the money as badly as other people.

This is a tragedy, in the sense that here we have the leader of the ruling party who has ruled for the longest period after the restoration of

the total), Rs 30 million to 588 of the UML (19 percent), Rs 5.7 million to 155 people of the Sanyukta Jan Morcha (3.5 percent), and Rs 2.8 million to 63 people of the ML (2 percent).

Jhala Nath Khanal (UML) received Rs 50,000 rupees although he stayed only four years, six months and 22 days in prison. He is a rich man and does not need this money. Chandra Bhandari (ML) is supposed to have spent more than seven years in prison. According to the official papers of the committee, he actually spent only two years, one month and 11 days in jail. He received the primary amount plus Rs 75,000.

In the same way, the official book states that Lok Krishna Bhattarai (ML) spent only seven

VIEWPOINT
by PRAKASH A RAJ

Lessons from the Andes

The Prachanda Path is deliberately named after the Shining Path. Nepal's rulers need to study the history of the Peruvian insurgency and look at how they can reverse the historical neglect of the peasantry and address the roots of the crisis.

SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia: There are strong reminders of home in this landlocked South American country. The Andes loom to the west, just like the Himalaya to our north, but here in the sweltering Amazon basin just 450 m above sea level it feels uncannily like Chitwan. La Paz, the highest capital city in the world at 3,627 m is 14 hours away by road. Like Nepal, Bolivia is also multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, but it is five times larger than Nepal, it is rich in minerals, and it has a per capita income several times greater than Nepal. Ten percent of the population are whites descended from early Spanish settlers. Next door is Peru, which has similar topography: the Andes like the high Himalaya, the Sierras like the Mahabharat and the Amazon plains like the Tarai.

And Peru also had the Shining Path movement (Sendero Luminoso) which erupted in 1980 and raged for 12 years in the remote and arid altiplano of Peru. It was led by a revolutionary Peruvian academic teaching at the University of Ayacucho, Abimael Guzman. There are many similarities between the Andean plateau and the mid-western districts of Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan and Jajarkot where our own Maoists launched their insurgency in February 1996. And like his comrade in Nepal, Babu Ram Bhattarai, Guzman came from a middle-class background, was a top student and also a PhD. Guzman's doctoral thesis was on the status of the indigenous Andean people in a state dominated by whites and mixed-parentage mestizos. The Senderistas were mainly indigenous people, although their leaders like Guzman tended to be white or mestizo.

Within three short years, Comrade Gonzalo (Guzman's *nom de guerre*) had chased off a demoralised Peruvian police from his stronghold around Ayacucho. The Army was called in, and the insurgency raged on till 1992 when Guzman was captured and ignominiously caged like a lion for the benefit of the media. In the 12 years that it dragged on, 25,000 Peruvians were killed, and the country lost half its GDP. David Scott Palmer, writing in his book *The Shining Path of Peru* (St Martins Press, New York, 1994) states that the government in Lima did not take the Senderistas seriously in the beginning. When the army did get involved, it was to take brutal and repressive measures in rural areas in which the Andean peasants were caught in the crossfire. This strengthened the local support for the Senderistas who were suffering from joblessness, inflation, lack of government and corruption.

Sounds familiar? Palmer says the other factors that fed the Shining Path revolution was that the indigenous Andean peasants were not integrated into Peru's social and economic mainstream, and they felt left out. In the beginning the Senderistas took action against corrupt officials and won populist backing, in urban areas they identified key opposition figures and intimidated or killed them. They tried to neutralise grassroots leaders from the moderate left. Towards the end, there was a personality cult surrounding Comrade Gonzalo who launched purges against suspected spies. After 12 years of war, according to Palmer, the peasants were fed up and felt that the Government could take better care of their needs.

An important lesson for Nepal is why the revolution did not spread to Bolivia, a landlocked country, and the poorest among the South America countries. Here, in Santa Cruz, I asked several Bolivians if the objective conditions for revolution were not the same in Bolivia as in Peru. But Bolivia was different: it had initiated largely-successful agrarian reforms in the 1950s, the country's decentralisation policy had devolved decision-making to the grassroots and also 20 percent of the national budget for local development so the peasants felt they were being heard, and there was considerable popular participation at the local level.

One of the classic studies of the Shining Path by Simon Strong, *Terror and Revolution in Peru* (Times Books, 1992) concluded that there was less of a chance for Sendero-type revolutions to succeed in countries like Bolivia and Ecuador because they had strong peasant organisations, more responsive central governments, and successful agrarian reforms. Our own Prachandanistas seem to have borrowed a leaf or two from the book of Comrade Gonzalo, and their strategy show remarkable similarities to the Sendero Luminoso. It will be important for Nepal's government and rulers to also study the conflict and look closely at the need to address their own legitimacy, at reversing the historical neglect of the peasantry and genuinely addressing their grievances by giving them political space to join the mainstream.

(Prakash A Raj is a Kathmandu-based writer who recently visited Bolivia as a consultant for the IUCN.)



amount of money have got it on the basis of political affiliation to a particular party, the party in power or through personal relations with the authorities or with members and officers of the committee.

People who are affiliated to the major political parties and who are rich enough have abused the system more than anyone else. The ruling parties have abused the system to a great extent. People have presented false statements to the committee and received money. A classic example is that of Bipin Koirala (NC) of Sindhuli. When the Panchayat system was instituted, Bipin Koirala was against it. Because of this he spent a total of one year, three months and six days in Nakkhu Jail. Later, he joined the Panchayat regime and during the 1990 movement he did

democracy presenting false statements just to receive a sum of money which he is not entitled to. If this is not corruption then what is it?

Another leader, Bimalendra Nidhi (NC), as stated in the official records of the committee, spent only 10 months and 16 days in prison. In the same book it is stated that he received the primary amount and Rs 50,000.

Dev Prakash Tripathi was once in the Communist Party of Nepal, but later joined the Nepali Congress. No one knows for sure whether he was in prison in 1986. The officials papers show that he was in prison for four years and seven months but he received Rs 50,000.

Of the Rs 150 million distributed so far, more than Rs 110 million was distributed to 2,376 Congressmen (73 percent of

months and 27 days in jail but received Rs 50,000. Hari Rokka (formerly ML) received Rs 75,000 rupees but it is not stated how long he stayed in jail.

Prakash Koirala of the Nepali Congress from Morang received Rs 50,000. Prakash Koirala of the NC from Sunsari then received some amount of money. Again Prakash Koirala from Sindhuli received the primary amount, and it has been stated that he spent two years, nine months and three days in jail. Is it the same Prakash Koirala who is mentioned in three different places or are they different people?

Most amazing is the fact that five ministers from the Panchayat regime too received Rs 50,000 each: Prayag Raj Singh Suwal, Megh Bahadur Shrestha, Singhadhoj Khadka, Bakhan Singh Gurung and Parsu Narayan Chowdhary. This just shows that the committee is not doing its work properly. ♦

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BIZ NEWS

Taking stock

The Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) Index took a 22 percentage point tumble last week, leading to fisticuffs at the exchange between retail buyers and sellers, brokers and officials of the exchange. Around 1 pm, 28 February, trading was going on as usual, when investors began banging on the glass panes separating the trading floor and the visitors' gallery. Blue chip banks, whose prices had been on a downswing for the last three months, were falling even lower, faster. Investors say the 27 brokers at the NEPSE are fixing prices in collusion with NEPSE officials.

Trading has become saner since, and both the Nepal Stock Exchange Ltd and the Securities Board (SB) are looking at what could have gone wrong. "There's more that could be done about transparency at the level of transactions and corporations," says Damber Prasad Dhungel, chairman of the securities board. That says it all, really. A cursory look at the prices and volume of stocks traded over time reveal that some bank stocks are changing hands several times faster than others—something the SB is now looking into. "We've met brokers and investors and all have agreed to ensure that more information is available to all investors and brokers," says Madan Raj Joshi, general manager of the NEPSE.

Analysts agree that some banks are selling faster and in larger volumes as compared to others, for no apparent reason, and that this could be the place to start investigations. Among them are the Bank of Kathmandu (BOK), the Nepal Bangladesh Bank (NB) and the Nepal Industrial and Commercial bank (NIC). NIC, which appeared on the charts selling at a high of Rs 610 in mid-July 2000, was trading at Rs 710 in December. On 28 February NIC stocks plunged to Rs 430. NB bank stocks have seen a similar trend—the price climbed from Rs 1,505 last July to reach Rs 3,050 in December, only to tumble to about Rs 2,100 last week. BOK shares sold at a high of Rs 1,000 last July, shot up to Rs 1,600 in December, and tumbled to Rs 1,040 on 28 February.

Banking stocks in Nepal have followed a path similar to IT stocks at exchanges in overseas markets, and the soaring prices were partly driven by a "boom syndrome". The lack of effective monitoring, mis-interpretation of Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) directives and lack of corporate transparency are other reasons that explain the freak price movements. NEPSE officials said that misinterpretation of the NRB directive to banks to have Rs 500 million as paid-up capital reserves by the end of this fiscal year partly fuelled the boom. The directive has since been re-interpreted to mean that this amount could also include reserves, and this sent the stocks tumbling. And that came on the heels of the realisation on the part of investors who expected to receive rights and bonus shares that it would not be as straightforward as they hoped.

Still diluting diesel

The long-overdue government inquiry on fuel adulteration has not yet presented its report, and predictably, rampant mixing of diesel and petrol with subsidised kerosene goes on. (See Nepali Times, # 19). Since that appeared, we have learnt that six tankers fully laden with diesel that arrived at the Fuel Depot near the airport in Kathmandu from Amlekhganj on 3 March were found to have been mixed with over 50 percent kerosene. Usually the Nepal Oil Corporation looks the other way if the adulteration is "only" 30 percent. But this time, there was disagreement about the price with NOC officials, who reportedly refused to unload the fuel unless they were paid Rs 20,000 per tanker, according to NOC sources. Tanker owners said they would pay Rs 5,000 per vehicle, and the bargaining continued until drivers, loaders and the administrators at NOC's Fuel Depot all wanted their share. This pushed the price up to Rs 25,000 per tanker which the tanker owners had to reluctantly part with. When contacted, a senior official at



the fuel depot, Kamal Dhungana told us: "We have no provision to return the fuel if it is adulterated." Which means the half-diesel, half-kerosene has now been "diluted" with the depot's 700,000 litre diesel tanks and passed on to gas stations in the capital. Next time you see thick black smoke billowing from the back of your fancy diesel four-wheel drive you know why.

Channel Nepal still on

The Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC) has renewed the satellite broadcasting licence of the Spacetime Network, which had earlier been cancelled on 3 January. The licence was cancelled by a controversial decision by the then minister in charge of MOIC, Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta. The company was charged of squatting on its license issued about eight years ago. The same criterion was not applied to another company, South Asian Broadcasting, which had not started preliminary work towards beginning broadcasting via satellite, while Spacetime's equipment had already arrived at the border customs office. MOIC sources said the old decision was reviewed after Spacetime applied to the Prime Minister's Office with evidence of the arrival of the equipment at Birgunj weeks before its licence was cancelled. The ministry was totally unaware of this.

The MIOC decision and its eventual reversal once again point to the discretionary authority that broadcasting laws grant the ministry, which is effectively both the licensing and regulatory authority. Generally, once a company is licensed, it becomes the effective owner of the allocated frequency forever, as there are no rules for the periodic auction of broadcast licences or frequencies. Nepal also does not have rules barring cross-ownership of media, such as a newspaper organisation owning a radio or television station. Channel Nepal, Spacetime's satellite channel, is to begin broadcasting within a few months.

Excellence in industry

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) has instituted an award to recognise excellence in industry and is seeking applications from its members. The award has a grandiose name—the National Excellence Award—and will be assessed against the Total Quality Management standard. It will measure industry leadership in terms of policies and commitment, management and operation systems, and overall results in terms of consumer satisfaction and relationships, employee satisfaction and, of course, the bottom-line. Small, medium and large organisations will be assessed separately, and the FNCCI says the prize "may" be awarded annually. Any takers?

Radisson prize

The Radisson Kathmandu has been awarded the 2000 Radisson President's Award. The annual prize is given by the Radisson Hotels & Resorts in recognition of "consistency in exceeding guest expectations," says a company press release. Radisson Kathmandu was one of four hotels in the Asia/Pacific region that were awarded.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED



The long monopoly

The new Indian budget cements economic reforms—but there are niggling hints of protectionism that should worry Nepali industry.

For many in India, the Indian finance minister's latest budget performance was close to a perfect ten. The mood in industry circles is jubilant—the Sensex, the index of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), registered a 177-point increase.

Nepal can learn a lot from this budget. Firstly, that maybe we should acknowledge that reforms are here to stay and secondly, that the model is globalisation. We need to formulate bold new labour laws and we can easily nick a few ideas from India as to how to make them industry-friendly. We need to set in place educational loan schemes and rationalise the taxation system.

Now for the bad part—the real meaning of the Indian budget for the future of the Nepali economy. Import regulations have been tightened to provide Indian industry with the protection it's been demanding, and a new provision requires that the maximum retail price (MRP) be indicated on exports to India. This means trouble for many Nepali industries, because their products will now have to meet the MRP stipulations laid down by Indian excise laws. These are pretty stiff non-tariff barriers, which require that importers have to declare the retail value of goods. Interestingly, the creation of this barrier is contrary to the WTO's rules on valuation, which stipulate that the value of goods be determined by the logistics of the transaction, rather

than what they are retailed at.

Equally worryingly, our days of generating revenue through the trade in gold are numbered. The new budget has lowered the import duty on gold to a mere IRs 250 per ten gm. This, combined with the easing of foreign exchange regulations, ensures that there's little reason for gold to find its way into India from Nepal. The long monopoly of gold imports on government revenues is over. We need to find another product to create the right combination for smuggling.

The Indians even have a sense of humour about their defensiveness. The Indian finance minister, Yashwant Sinha, attempted to liven up the proceedings when he came to "edible oils and allied imports": "We shall move swiftly whenever any perceptible threat on account of imports is noticed."

There have been huge increases in the customs duty on various forms of edible oils and refined oils, as well as crude oil imported by vanaspati manufacturers. Indian oil lobby in India has got out of a slippery situation, where their business was apparently threatened by imports from Nepal.

There's even more disturbing news for the long term for Nepal—duties on agricultural products have also been hiked. The import duty on tea alone has been doubled. Here, domestic production is close to outstripping demand, and Nepali

tea growers were eyeing the Indian market. How profitable the tea industry will remain, and for how much longer is something to think about.

To be sure, budgets are statements of intent, and what the people behind them have in mind might be quite different from the interpretations put forth in offices and factories in Raxaul or Jogbani. But still, it is hard to be persuaded that we won't be affected by this budget. The changes to the Customs Tariff Act—the new guidelines related to the MRP and imports—will probably hit us the hardest. We've seen how long it takes official notification to get from Patna to Raxaul. There will be some anxious moments for Nepali businesses before they know the exact changes that will affect them.

We also must wait for more fine-tuned analyses in the Indian press to see other repercussions the budget may have for us. This Beed has gone on a little about the negative impact of the budget on Nepali industry. There's a glimmer of hope, though—the Indian budget is pro-business, is strategically targeted at achieving a specific growth rate. Nepal might well benefit from the spillover. We saw a boom in our economy when India went into the first phase of economic reforms—we can only hope this will happen again. ♦

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

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Convenient conventions

A NEPALI TIMES REPORT

much has been written about the fragile nature of Nepal's tourism industry. And recent events have been responsible for much caution and pessimism. But there's hope in one sector of the hospitality business which has been growing steadily, and promises to help break the seasonality cycle in arrivals. If all goes well, Nepal could be bursting at the seams with convention tourists.

It is beginning to happen already. The Birendra International Convention Centre (BICC) is hosting a large conference of educators later this year. Education International (EI)—the Brussels-based global union for the teaching profession—is having its Third World Congress 25-29 July. The House of Rajkarnikar is helping organise the mega-event, including an Education Exchange Exhibition at the venue. Over 350 delegates from the EI from 150 countries are expected to attend. In addition there will also be representatives of EI's partners, and observers.

A convention of this scale would

regional connections and also simpler visa formalities.

Nepal's new and still reasonably well-kept convention venue, BICC, has the capacity to host a Non-Aligned Movement-sized summit. In addition, major hotels in Kathmandu and Pokhara have facilities comparable to any city in the region. "The gap is our inability to go out in a big way to get MICE travellers," says Rana. NICA is an association of about 20 major hotels, airlines and travel agents. The Nepal Tourism Board acknowledges the potential of MICE but has yet to focus marketing on this "new" product though it has supported NICA participation in promotion. "We'll begin to make MICE presentations to Indian corporates this month," says Mohan Bahadur Parsai, a manager at NTB. "We're already doing a little to spread the word."

What Nepal offers to incentive travellers—quick treks,



cheaper than in India, especially if held in the low-tourism season. MICE could be the first product since RD Tuttle's IRs555 package that helped to attack the seasonality factor head on. Our tourists come mainly September to late-April, and the slack sets in from May. "This is when we need tourists the most," says NICA's Rana. "The low rates will also benefit companies granting travel incentives to employees or conference 'budget' organisers."

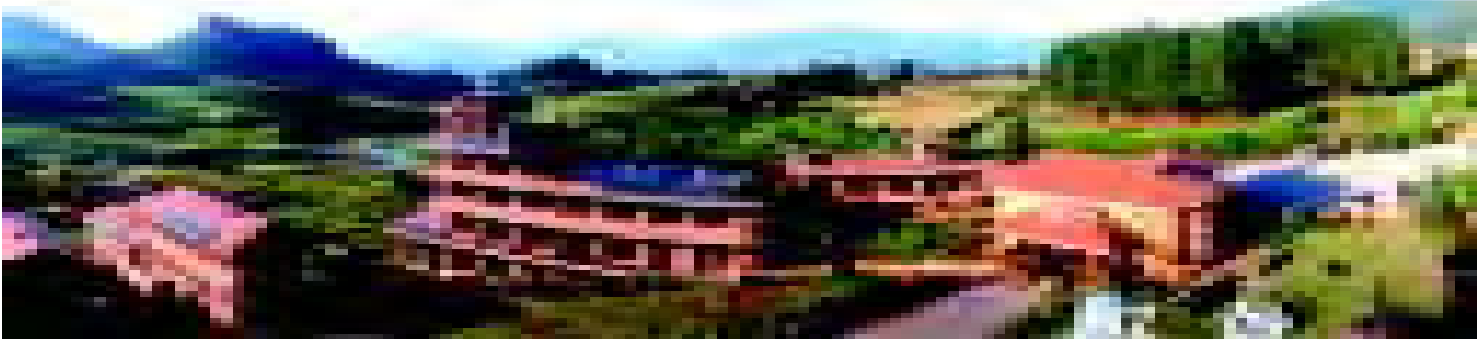
Clockwise from left: Soaltee Holiday Inn, Yak and Yeti, the Godavari Resort and the Birendra International Convention Centre.

Nepal could turn into a major destination for convention tourism. MICE is a mighty nice way to go.

rafting trips, or mountain flights—has no regional parallel. But most importantly, costs are low and a convention here can be many times

Most top hotels are now getting ready to accommodate conference groups. Shridhar Acharya, Managing Director of the Godavari Village Resort, an upmarket property 14 km south of Kathmandu, says: "We had on an average one conference a day last year. This year also looks good, but all depends on how we deal with issues like the hotel strike and security." Godavari's proximity to the city gives it a distinct advantage. "Our clients commend us for the relative isolation and tranquillity," says Janaki Shah, executive director. Just in case some guests may be unhappy for not being able to shop and unwind, the hotel provides a free shuttle service to come to town. It is this upswing in the conferencing market that explains why even a "village" resort has four "function rooms", with capacities ranging from 20-180 persons theatre-style, and facilities that compare with any 5-star hotel.

There was a time when the



Bluestar Hotel in Thapathali was the venue for most of Kathmandu's seminars and conferences. It has six meeting and exhibition halls and its offspring, Bluebird Pokhara, also has similar capacity. But competition is closing in. Large hotels like the Yak & Yeti have added new facilities and even smaller ones like Narayani in Pulchowk have added the function rooms. The BICC can seat up to 1,044 persons at its main hall and gallery (generally for observers), and has four smaller meeting rooms that can take between 50-100 people. BICC also has capability to offer simultaneous translation into six languages.

The facilities at big hotels are getting bigger. Soaltee's Megha and

Malhar rooms can seat about 380 classroom-style and accommodate 1,000 for cocktails. The Lal Durbar Convention Centre's Regal I & II at Yak & Yeti can accommodate 950 for cocktails and 360 in classroom-style seating. Radisson's largest hall can accommodate 800 for cocktails. The brand-new Hyatt Regency also has similar facilities.

With so many places to choose from, organisers who do their rounds can get the best deals. Generally, hotels don't charge for space if meals are to be served. They also offer corporate discounts on room tariffs if conferences are organised in the same hotel. It is this competition that has forced almost every hotel worth its name to build meeting rooms. ♦

bring in more guests during the peak monsoon, when western tourists barely trickle in. Traditionally, Indian tourists fill Nepal's hotels in the summer but their numbers are also dwindling. The EI conference will have on-site catering, which means those in the business will have something more to do than just serve food at weddings and *bratavandas*. Travel agents and taxi drivers will get more business, mountain flights more passengers and some groups may even decide to extend their stay to sneak out to Pokhara or Dhulikhel—increasing tourist receipts and spreading money around.

Nepal's tourism industry, which has been in a tailspin since late-1999, could definitely use more of such events. And though large conventions are still rare, they could well emerge as a new "product" to help Nepal diversify and sell more than just adventure and culture. "Adventure does not bring in the top dollar, conventions can get us people who expect quality and spend more," says Subodh Rana, president of the Nepal Incentive and Convention Association (NICA). Adventure serves a purpose, it takes tourism income to villages. "But big money is in meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE)," he adds.

Nepal has some distinct advantages over its South Asian neighbours for going the MICE way. Now with the Lauda 767, even Royal Nepal has adequate seats for flying people in, not to mention direct connections provided by other airlines such as Transavia, Austrian, Qatar and Gulf that fly in from Europe and West Asia. There are roughly 20,000 air seats available each week. Connections in East Asia are also well served by Royal Nepal, Singapore and Thai, among others. Nepal has

seagrams

The world's hottest chilli, chemical weaponry, and why one enjoys a hot dish more than once in its journey through the body.

ESTHER ADDLEY IN LONDON

he Mayan Indians had the right idea about chilli: eat it with great caution, but inflict it on those you don't like without mercy. Unfortunate enemies of the tribe would retreat from battle under a hail of the spicy peppers, though it is not recorded whether the Mayans then ran after them to pick up their fruity weapons, which they also used, presumably rather bruised, as currency.

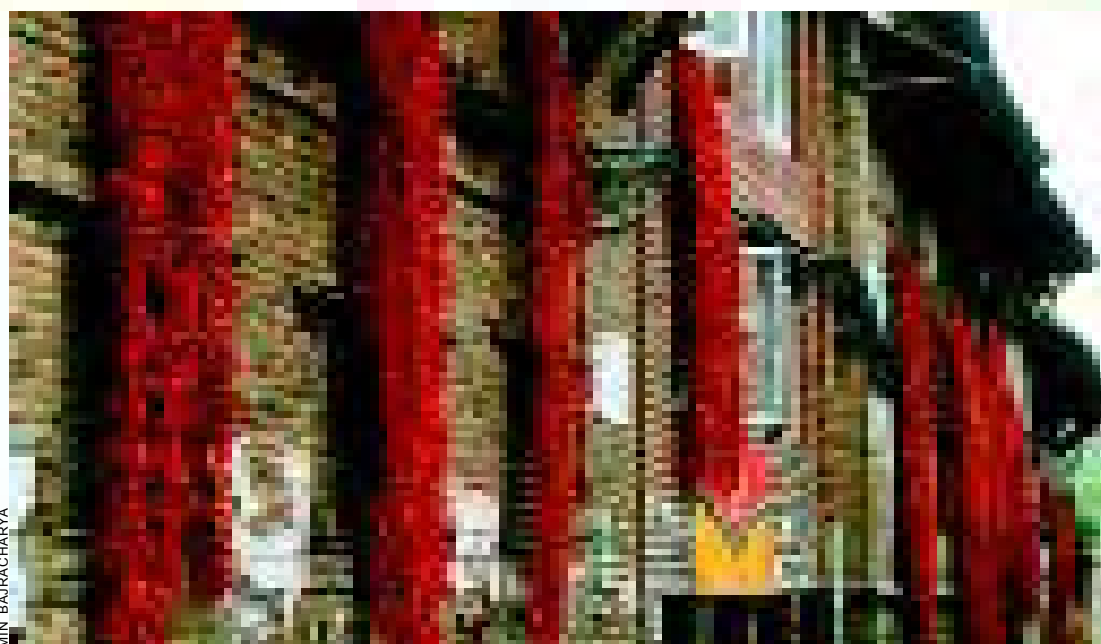
But when it came to their cuisine the Mayans really knew how to treat chilli with respect. They even had a word for it: *huuyub*. That is, to pucker one's mouth and take a sharp intake of breath after taking too large a bite of a chilli.

Chillies have always occupied the more hardcore end of the cookery scale. Few other seed fruits, after all, hold the dubious distinction of having been used as instruments of torture. Powdered chilli has traditionally been used as a weapon in India, to particular effect when thrown in the eye of an attacker. It also forms the basis of pepper sprays, used increasingly in place of other chemicals by police forces to restrain offenders.

But it seems the chillies we have known until now have been feeble things, mere kormas compared to a killer vindaloo waiting to be sampled. Scientists recently unveiled a variety of pepper that makes all that has gone before seem about as spicy as a cucumber—and what's more, it does not even come from the new world where the fruit originated.

This new pepper, the *naga jolokia* or Tezpur chilli, is so hot it is reputed practically to induce heart failure in anyone who hasn't grown up with its intestine-stripping qualities. And it is not from New Mexico or the Caribbean, but from India. The Mayans may have liked their food spicy, but put them up against a bunch of kids from the banks of the Brahmaputra river in Assam, north-east India, and they would be ordering another pint and making a dash for the bathroom like the rest of us.

The reason behind the Tezpur chilli's almost inedible hotness is its extraordinary high concentration of capsaicin, the chemical in chillies that produces their characteristic burn. Chilli heat is measured on a sliding scale developed by Wilbur Scoville, a chemist working for the Parke Davis pharmaceutical company, in 1912. His "organoleptic test" involved five volunteers sampling a sugar solution containing ground chilli paste in increasingly dilute concentrations, until they could no



longer detect the chilli burn. His method was replaced in the 80s with a rather more scientific test based on liquid chromatography, but chillies are still measured in Scoville units. To give some measure of the Tezpur chilli's eye-watering pungency, jalapeno peppers merit about 5,000 points on the Scoville scale. The Tezpur scores 855,000.

One might, in fact, be well placed to prosecute a chef serving up Tezpur con carne for grievous bodily harm. This is because the way we "taste" chilli in dishes is not entirely to do with our sense of taste. As Dr Len Fisher, a biophysicist and food writer from Bristol University, England, notes, the suspicion that eating a raw chilli is all about pain has a strong basis in chemical fact. "The tongue is the thing that picks up taste: sweet, sour, salt, bitter and umami," he says. "Your mouth is also full of pain receptors that will send nerve signals to the brain. The chemical capsaicin can bind to these pain receptors and set them off like a switch so your brain is interpreting them as pain and damage to the tongue."

The chemical does not get less potent during cooking, and is also extremely resistant to being broken down in the intestinal tract, which is why one can enjoy a very hot dish more than once in its

journey through the body. The capsaicin burn will be detected on any mucus membranes, such as the inner nose, eyes and sex organs, hence the advice to wash very thoroughly after preparing chillies and before using the bathroom. As Fisher notes delicately, "once capsaicin binds to a receptor it binds very strongly and is rather hard to move." But, he adds reassuringly, capsaicin does not actually cause any damage to the body, despite sometimes emphatically giving that impression.

This knowledge is little comfort

when your insides are being burned to a crisp, however. Neither does it explain why we continue to eat curries and chillies in ever-increasing strengths when the sensation is often so very unpleasant.

This has to do with the fact that capsaicin also prompts the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers and "feelgood" hormones. In fact, capsaicin and chillies in general are full of health-giving properties. Chillies contain twice as much vitamin C as citrus fruits, and the dried fruit is an extremely rich source of vitamin A. Even its "pain" inducing qualities can be beneficial, since repeated exposure to capsaicin dulls the pain receptors. This allows curry fans to eat increasingly hot dishes, but also explains the efficacy of capsaicin cream in treating conditions like arthritis.

Kalim Mir, proprietor of the award-winning Darma restaurant in Manchester (England's famous "curry mile") explains the preference for chillies in hot countries like Mexico and India by their sweat-inducing property. Chilli makes you perspire, he says, which cools down the body, allowing you to eat more chilli.

To illustrate his point, he prepares a vindaloo, a dish loaded with chillies that he admits is entirely inauthentic ("I don't think the word vindaloo exists in the Indian dictionary") but nonetheless serves up with enthusiasm to drunk Manchester revellers. The original dish, an appetising vegetable vindaloo, he decides is not spicy enough for testing purposes; it comes back from the kitchen with a liberal sprinkling of alarmingly scarlet ground chillies on top. "Have that bit there, then you'll be sweating," he says. "If you don't you're not normal." Sure enough, within minutes the photographer and I are huuyubbing heartily. (Fisher's advice for dealing with chilli burn, incidentally, is to eat dessicated coconut. "It's a solid that is oily enough to take up and hold the capsaicin and keep it away from

your mucus membranes, and has a large surface area to absorb the capsaicin.")

Despite my request for the hottest dish on the menu, however, Mir is anxious to stress that the flavour and enjoyment of spicy dishes is not due only to their chilli content. "Hot curry has chilli but also cloves, cardamom, cumin and nutmeg. It is these spices that really bring out the aroma and taste. If you use chilli in too great a quantity it just burns and it spoils its taste. Chilli's hotness is different to the spicy hotness. If you put a

clove in your mouth it burns, but it's a different type of burning," Rocky Durham, executive chef at the Santa Fe restaurant chain in London and an

expert in Mexican and New Mexican cuisine, is in emphatic agreement. "To talk about chillies only in terms of heat is the same as talking about wine and only mentioning the alcohol. "His favourite chilli, "this week", is the comparatively mild chipotle, "a hard wood smoked, dried jalapeno". "It's great in soups and sauces," he says. "It gives this wonderful smoky heat. There are so many ways to use chilli to explore with: some that have been smoked, some are dried, some are toasted, blackened, burned before they are used. The important thing is to get a depth of flavour into the food rather than just concentrating on the heat."

And so what future beckons for the Tezpur chilli, now officially the hottest in the world, twice as strong as its nearest rival in Mexico, the red savina Habanero (which scores 577,000 on the Scoville scale)? It seems its culinary uses are to be eclipsed by its pain-inducing properties: scientists from the local defence research laboratory in Tezpur hope to use it as the main ingredient in a new tear gas. ♦ (Guardian)



Some swear by it, some sweat after eating it, but there is no denying that chillies give Nepali food its distinct character.

SUJATA TULADHAR

There is no specific food that could be termed Nepali except the generic *daal bhat tarkari*, but there are plenty of dishes whose mere mention can put foreign tongues on fire while making a Nepali's mouth water wildly. There is nothing better to stimulate the noontime mind of a snack-minded civil servant than *achar* or a hot dish with *chiura*. Your mouths watering already? That's called the Pavlov Effect.

Kathmandu being a red hot melting pot is also a connoisseur's delight. From authentic Newari dishes, to influences blown in from the hills of the east and the west and the plains of the south, one can get anything and everything. And a lot of it is very spicy.

Sanyakhuna is a Newari dish that cannot be anything but spicy hot. It is a broth of dry fish, salt, oil



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Kathmandu's red hot melting pot

and chilli powder, and other exotic spices, which is boiled until all the ingredients dissolve into one unrecognisable translucent reddish mass. It is only eaten after it cools down and resembles jelly. *Takhala* is also prepared using the same procedure but with water buffalo meat, including the skin. Both are dishes that Newari people just can't do without during Kathmandu winters. *Chhwela* is roasted buffalo meat, garnished with generous amounts of spices—mainly chilli powder. *Haku* (black) *chhwela* is a variant of *chhwela* that can be even hotter than regular *chhwela*.

A delicacy at the famous Hunacha's Pasal at Patan Darbar Square is *aalu tarkari* (potato curry). Fiery red in appearance and equally fiery in taste, the dish attracts masochistic people who nearly have smoke coming out of their ears, but love every minute of it. Then there is *tama aalu*, made with bamboo shoots and potatoes and considered to be more delicious with that extra green chilli floating on top. The greatly relished *gundruk ko jhol* (gundruk soup) is a generic dish eaten by almost all Nepalis. Made from fermented and dried green vegetables, usually radish leaves or spinach, it goes with anything and everything provided the gravy has whole *lapsis* and is mined with large red chillies.

One community that cannot be ignored when we talk of hot Nepali food are Thakalis. Coming from the

higher climes, Thakali food seems to be designed to keep warm during the long windy winters on the Kali Gandaki Valley. Dishes like *Aalunkhu* (soup with dry meat and white flour balls) can be so spicy that they actually serve as a central heating system for the body. One spice that needs mention here is the *timbur ko chhop*, which is a double whammy of ground spicy *timbur* berries, with chilli powder and salt. Just goes to show that it is not just chillies that give Nepali food its zing—timbur can be just as potent.

The momos that Kathmandu lives on cannot, in their turn, do without a chilli sauce. The *achar* is a paste of chilli, garlic, tomatoes and salt, and you can have a thousand variants of the sauce in little shops across the Valley. Discerning momo buffs follow the trail of good *achar*, and the spicier the better.

Then there are the pickles. Almost all pickles must have chillies, but there are pickles made solely from chillies. These are the mothers of all pickles: pure red hot lava coming out of a volcano. These must be handled with care. Sarala Bhattarai, a pickle supplier for the WEAN cooperative says: "Even if the pickle is not very hot, the combination of vinegar and chilli gives a good colour to the product." So the scary-looking pickle bottle may not be the spiciest, but one can never tell. The proof of the pickle is in the

eating. There are some families whose pickles are famous far and wide. "There is a family I know which is believed to have been using the same pickle for the past twelve years. Every time a woman gives birth in any house, they send for pickle from there," says Pramila Shah, another pickle supplier.

Research has shown that chilli is highly advantageous to the body. And this is partly explained by Amit Gupta, a homeopath, who says: "Pickles might not do the body much good together with excessive spices and oil, but chilli has ulcer-healing properties and is very good

for rapid healing of ruptures during labour."

Chilli is also supposed to boost blood circulation, and helps maintain body heat. Not surprisingly, the sale of pickles soars in winters. A great analgesic and antiseptic, chilli is also believed to strengthen the body's immune system, normalising blood pressure and protecting against heart disease. "My own grandmother, who lived till 95, was very active and had an amazingly good memory till 90. We suspect that her daily diet of scorching hot chilli sauce that nobody else ever touched must have done it," says Amit Gupta.



Which chillies are the hottest? Kathmandu markets offer a wide variety of chillies of all shapes, colours and sizes. Arguably, the hottest of them all is the *jire* chilli, or the bird's eye chilli, and, according to those who have survived to tell the tale, it can be like swallowing a live grenade. Its origins are traced to Jiri (in Dolakha district) and legend has it that it is even hotter than Mexican chillis. *Jyanmara* chilli, as its name indicates, is bloody murder, and is used sparingly for its taste, especially in pickles. As the *sahuni* in the famous *bara* shop in Patan Darbar Square puts it: "The jyanmara is too hot. It sets your mouth on fire and smoke comes out of your nostrils."

Then there are varieties with similar appearances like *jhene* chilli or the red cluster pepper, the *dhorke* chilli and the *chhucho* chilli or cone pepper. In the presence of such worthies, the common capsicum or bell pepper is considered a vegetable rather than a spice. ♦

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THOMAS CRAMPTON
HONG KONG - Greg Tarr was awfully upset about his new Internet-enabled telephone when he unsuccessfully tried to log on to text services offered for his late-model Nokia telephone, designed for WAP, or wireless application protocol, services at a Hong Kong restaurant. His other mobile phone only works in South Korea, but goes online almost instantly and allows Tarr to check the weather, trade stocks and play games online. Tarr, manager of a venture-capital fund in Asia, uses a third phone in Japan, the wildly popular i-mode handset.

Many Asians have the Internet in their pockets. High cellular phone penetration rates and a relatively low density of personal computers make Asia fertile ground for mobile Internet growth. Companies, technologies and approaches are battling it out, country by country, on exactly how it is to be delivered. Experiments into regulating, transmitting and selling mobile Internet services are well under way, with a range of business plans already launched and modified—or even tried and discarded.

The single most successful foray into wireless Internet has been Japan's i-mode telephone. A teen fashion craze since its introduction in February 1999, the service, sold by NTT DoCoMo, is a serious revenue source, one that it plans to export to Europe and, on the heels of a major deal last week with AT&T, to the US very soon. Nearly one in 10 Japanese subscribes to the service. Its cute offerings—cartoon characters and electronic pets—have been tempered by sites offering news, financial information and directory services. Subscribers to i-mode check into the wireless service an average of 10 times a day each, but people in most of Asia, Europe and the US, face frustration attempting to use the much-touted WAP system.

I-mode rocks while WAP has floundered, it would seem. But Scott Goldman, CEO of an organisation that promotes and coordinates the development of WAP, says: "Comparing i-mode to WAP is like placing apples next to oranges. If the service is bad, don't complain to WAP, complain to your mobile telephone service provider." Goldman runs the WAP Forum, an eight-person organisation based in California that coordinates the over 600 companies actively involved in developing the protocol's standards. Any description that pits i-mode against WAP is erroneous, Goldman says, since the creator of i-mode, DoCoMo, is also a member of the WAP Forum. "I-mode is a very successful service that is literally and metaphorically on an island," Goldman said. "DoCoMo may be strong and powerful, but it would be mighty difficult for them

The wireless war

Asia battles it out over a mobile Internet.

to convince all 600 members of the WAP Forum to drop their commonly developed standard in favour of the i-mode." With the expressed intentions of both standards to adopt the new programming language XML, some level of convergence between i-mode and WAP appears inevitable.

DoCoMo hints that it might make i-mode compatible with WAP, and export its handsets as early as 2002. Global roaming would be impossible for DoCoMo's Japan-specific standards, and so the company has started groundwork for exporting i-mode with purchases of minority stakes in mobile carriers and deals with content providers around the world. In addition to reported talks with carriers LG Electronics and SK Telecom Co in South Korea and C&W Optus in Australia, DoCoMo has already invested in the carrier KG Telecom in Taiwan, KPN Mobile NV in the Netherlands and Hutchinson 3G in Britain and has signed a memorandum with the media and Internet giant America Online Inc. Most significant and telling, however, was the Japanese company's \$9.8 billion purchase of a 16 percent stake in US-based AT&T Wireless Group announced last week. DoCoMo promises an operational American version of i-mode by the end of next year.

This grand globe-conquering strategy cannot be countered by a similar WAP tactic, because WAP isn't owned by any single company. But the WAP Forum's membership already reaches around the world and includes the largest manufacturers of mobile-telephone equipment such as Nokia, Ericsson and Motorola. Instead, WAP supporters rely on convincing consumers, software developers and phone companies that it is already the de facto mobile-telephone standard. You could think of i-mode as a one-company, tightly engineered service, like America Online's proprietary software, and WAP as an open system, like the Internet. I-mode provides specific, carefully chosen, consumer-targeted services, while WAP allows entry into an often chaotic universe. "You may visit a bad website, but that doesn't mean you dismiss the Web," Goldman said.

Misleading advertising deserves much of the blame for WAP's tarnished reputation, he said. "I would be a lot happier doing my job if more realistic expectations had been promoted," Goldman says. Among the wireless Internet ads aired recently in Asia is a humorous Nokia TV spot with people speaking into video cameras as if they were telephones and making phone calls from their credit cards. "It's like watching Baywatch," Goldman says. "If I believed all women should look like that, I would live my life disappointed. WAP supporters believe that their system will set the fundamental standards for the wireless Internet into the future. But independent analysts suggest that newer standards could replace both WAP and i-mode in a few years. In addition to convergence toward XML programming language by both sides, the highly adaptive java language may

overtake both.

Analysts say i-mode is a difficult model to export. Mobile operators will find it difficult to duplicate its business model, since they cannot exert the absolute influence DoCoMo does over handset manufacturing, the mobile network and small innovative companies supplying content. As a network operator and handset manufacturer, DoCoMo totally controls two of three aspects of the business. This allows for a smooth integration of proprietary handset technology with a proprietary network and makes for easy coordination for billing consumers for using specific services. As for content providers, DoCoMo makes the barriers to entry very low and offers exceptionally generous returns. Small companies interested in selling innovative content to i-mode customers receive assistance and

occasionally even office space or a direct investment from DoCoMo. DoCoMo pays about 90 percent of the revenues to content providers.

In South Korea, telecom companies have started adopting a similar strategy with their wireless services. Sister companies LG Electronics and LG Telecom, for example, coordinated development of handsets for their network and recently started cultivating a more friendly, open and generous attitude towards content providers. In terms of speed, South Korean operators are well ahead of DoCoMo in territory that many analysts say already qualifies as 3G. All operators run systems that sprint at a maximum speed of 144 kilobits per second, compared with i-mode's snail-like pace of 9.6 kilobits per second.

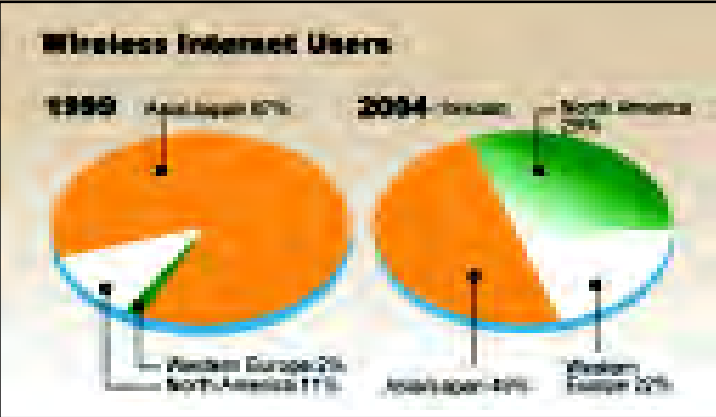
Several systems are based on variants of WAP, but Korean carriers have developed proprietary

handset systems. Since the trading of stocks on office computers is prohibited by many companies, employees often buy and sell shares on cell phones in the privacy of the toilet or outside on the street. The challenge for WAP will be to coordinate among mobile operators and small companies that offer services to ensure timely payment and allow instant delivery of stock quotes and other information.

"A successful wireless-Internet service sits on a three-legged stool," says Tarr, who runs a \$100 million fund called M-Werks that invests in wireless start-ups in South Korea and Japan. "If the manufacturers,

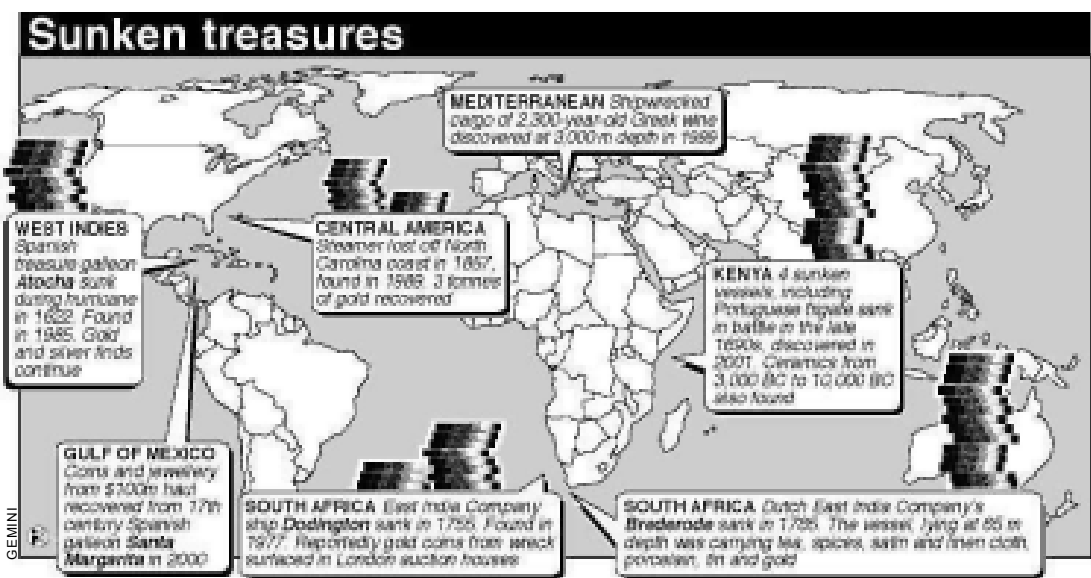
network operators and small software companies do not cooperate, it just won't work," he notes. The increased bandwidth that will come online in the next few years carries high stakes for the spread of WAP technology. Goldman is convinced that by the time bandwidth increases, WAP will already be deeply entrenched as the default operating system for wireless Internet access.

Tarr, the venture-fund manager with three phones, is less convinced. "It is too early to predict since we just don't know what sort of environment such wide bandwidth will give us," he said. ♦



mercantile

Raiders of the lost arks



There is much looting from some 2,200 wrecks lying along the South African coast.

RUSSEL MOLEFE IN JOHANNESBURG
Nearly 250 years ago a haul of gold coins sank to the bottom of the ocean off the coast of South Africa. On 1 March, 405 of them were handed over to the Bayworld Museum in Port Elizabeth—a third of a consignment of 1,200 coins that have come to be known as Clive’s Gold.

The coins would not have returned to South African hands had it not been for alert staff at the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in Johannesburg. They noted that in 1997 a London auction house planned to put on

sale gold coins that their anonymous sellers claimed were part of a booty once belonging to Robert Clive, the 18th century British general and empire builder. SAHRA mounted a challenge in the courts arguing that the coins were illegally removed from South African waters. It enlisted the support of the London auction house Spink and Son, which refused to return the coins to the sellers after hints of impropriety came to light. In an out-of-court settlement with the prospective sellers, South Africa received 405 coins. “Had the discoverers of the treasure come to

us with their find, we would probably have negotiated an equitable division of the coins between them and the state which would have allowed them to legally dispose of their share,” says John Gribble, SAHRA’s maritime geologist. “The fact that they opted for a cloak-and-dagger approach clearly illustrates a lack of respect for South African law and the rights of the public to enjoy and learn about their heritage,” Gribble adds, referring to the fact that the mysterious sellers were never identified. There is a story to be

told, nevertheless, and it goes back nearly 250 years. Robert Clive (1725-1774), an army officer who later came to be known as Clive of India for his military exploits in India, had been hand-picked to establish Britain’s influence in the Indian Ocean. He set sail from England with a fleet of five British East India Company ships on 22 April 1755 to carry out his mission. While Clive stayed on his flagship *Stretham*, he put his personal fortune in gold aboard the ship *Dodington*. The first half of the voyage was uneventful—other than the fact that the *Dodington*, being the superior vessel, easily overtook the others—the *Pelham*, *Edgecote*, *Houghton* and *Stretham*. But after rounding Cape Agulhas off the coast of South Africa shortly after midnight on 17 July—almost three months after setting sail—the *Dodington* struck a reef near Bird Island in Algoa Bay. Records show that of the 270 crew on board, only 203 made it to Bird Island where they spent a few months stranded. They eventually built a boat named *Happy Deliverance* and sailed to Mozambique where they were rescued. The loss of the gold did not stop Clive from amassing ever more wealth—and the greed proved to be his downfall. One of the most corrupt colonial administrators in

India, Clive was investigated by the British parliament in 1773 on his return from India. His wealth led to allegations that he had abused his power. Clive committed suicide the next year. The fact that Clive’s Gold and most of the other valuables that went down were never recovered meant that the *Dodington* came to be viewed as a ‘treasure ship’, though the exact location of the wreck was unknown for more than 200 years. It was the patience of two men—David Allen and Gerry van Niekerk, then holders of the only permit to salvage the site—that led to the discovery of the ship in 1977. A large number of artefacts that were recovered were later donated to the Bayworld Museum. Twenty years later, a report in *The Times* of London about the auction of 1,200 gold coins touted as Clive’s Gold raised SAHRA’s suspicions, according to Gribble. Neither the anonymous sellers nor the auction house linked the gold coins directly with the wreck. But a United States-based agent acting for the sellers came up with a vague story about a group of pirates having stumbled upon the *Dodington* just as she was going down. The pirates, the story went, made such a clean getaway with the gold that none of *Dodington*’s survivors knew of

it. But the pirates’ ship was also wrecked, the agent said, and was discovered by a group of unnamed divers in the 1990s. What roused SAHRA’s suspicions was the assertion that the remains of the pirate ship were lying conveniently beyond South Africa’s territorial waters. South Africa claims jurisdiction over cultural heritage in both its territorial waters which extend 12 nautical miles (18.52 km) offshore, and the contiguous zone which extends a further 12 nautical miles. “At this distance (of the pirate-ship wreck), conventional diving is impossible because average water depth is around 200 metres,” says Gribble. “Furthermore, the likelihood of finding the wreck of a small wooden vessel on a virtually limitless expanse of seabed with no reefs upon which it may have been wrecked—or upon which to base a modern underwater search—is less probable than finding a needle in a haystack.” Clive’s Gold could be the tip of the iceberg. Gribble believes there is much looting from some 2,200 wrecks lying along the South African coast. “It’s one wreck per kilometre and we hear of looting from the wrecks. Lack of resources makes it difficult to police the wrecks but we hope the situation will improve,” says Gribble. But that will not solve the mystery of Clive’s Gold—not unless the anonymous sellers want to tell a more believable tale. ♦ (*Gemini*)

“Foreign” Britain

Conservative leader William Hague is ranting again—but many Tories are annoyed.

NICHOLAS WATT
William Hague last week upped the stakes in the pre-election battle when he came close to playing the race card with a provocative warning that Tony Blair wants to turn Britain into a “foreign land”. To the fury of “one nation” Tories, Hague reached out to the hard core on the right of the party to warn of the dangers of a second Labour term in office. “Let me take you on a journey to a foreign land—to Britain after a second term of Tony Blair,” Hague told the Tory spring conference in Harrogate as he warned of the prime minister’s determination to destroy Britain by surrendering more powers to Brussels.

The use of such a loaded term, which was designed to appeal to grassroots Tories who appear to be growing increasingly disillusioned with his leadership, was condemned by former deputy prime minister Michael Heseltine. Heseltine, who admitted over the weekend that he had faced a “dilemma” in deciding whether to vote Conservative, said he disagreed with the speech, which echoed a growing feeling of xenophobia in Britain. Responding to Hague’s fear that Labour would turn Britain into a “foreign land”, Heseltine said: “We disagree. Does anyone seriously think that France is a “foreign” country? Or that Germany is a “foreign” country? “These are great giant nation states fighting for their self-interest and they believe their self-interest is better

sought and protected and advanced in concert with their neighbours than apart from them.” Hague sparked the row during a hardline speech in which he pledged to lock up all asylum seekers and rounded on Blair for destroying Britain. To the delight of his audience, some of whom waved union flags, Hague said a second Labour term would make Britain unrecognisable. Labour’s Britain would lead to: “The Royal Mint melting down pound coins as the euro notes start to circulate. Our currency gone forever. The chancellor returning from Brussels carrying instructions to raise taxes still further.” He said: “It’s your last chance to vote for a Britain that still controls its own destiny.” Hague adopted a harsh tone on asylum seekers. He said: “The next Conservative government will assess the validity of asylum claims within weeks, not years. And, where applications are unfounded, immediate deportation will follow.” His remarks, which exasperated “one nation” Tories at the conference, were a clear attempt to enthrone hardcore Tories who appear to have given up on Hague’s leadership. A series of recent polls which have given Labour an emphatic lead over the Conservatives were reinforced last week by one showing that few Tories believe they can win the election. The poll, carried out by YouGov Opinion Research for the Observer, found that more than three-quarters of Tory activists believe they will lose the election. More than a third believe Hague should resign early in the next

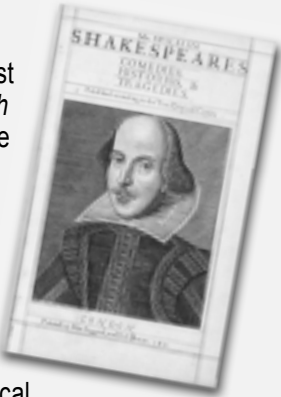


parliament. He attempted to brush aside such gloom in Harrogate, insisting that he can win by appealing to Britain’s “hard-working mainstream majority” who have been hit by Labour’s “stealth taxes”. Behind the spin, however, the Tory leadership knows it cannot win the election and should concentrate on drumming up support among grassroots supporters, two million of whom stayed at home in 1997. Under the influence of the Euro-MP Daniel Hannan, his new hardline Euro-sceptic speech writer, Hague is reverting to the tactics of last spring when he lurched to the right in the run-up to the local elections. Cabinet ministers lined up last night to criticise Hague. Jack Straw, the home secretary, condemned his pledge to lock up all asylum seekers while their claims are processed. “It is difficult to know whether this is based on abject opportunism or deep-seated personal prejudice, which is worse,” he said. “Locking up all asylum

seekers while their claims are processed is inhuman and impractical and would cost billions and take years. What would he do meanwhile?” The Liberal Democrat leader, Charles Kennedy, said Hague’s speech was “not common sense but complete nonsense.” “The last time William Hague let himself and his party run riot on this theme of so-called patriotism and defence of the nation, he lost the Romsey byelection. He should have learnt the lesson then that British people are not taken in by his thinly veiled little Englander sentiments and populist propaganda,” he added. Even the outgoing US ambassador raised doubts about the wisdom of distancing Britain from the EU, saying such a move would damage Britain’s relations with Washington. In an interview on Sky News, Philip Lader said: “For 50 years it has been the American government’s policy that a Britain more deeply engaged in Europe is good for Europe, good for Britain, and good for America.” ♦ (*Guardian*)

Dopey Bard?

Shakespeare may have written on drugs. The Bard was linked to drug-use by forensic analysis of pipes found in his home at Stratford Upon Avon. Although the evidence was circumstantial, scientists from the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria said the results were a revelation about drug use in 17th century England. Two of the 24 pipes they tested bore traces of cocaine, the first time the drug has been found in Europe and dated pre-19th century. Others had traces of myristic acid, a hallucinogen derived from plants, and traces of cannabis and tobacco. “The cocaine found is really quite remarkable,” said Dr Francis Thackeray, a palaeontologist who co-wrote the article in the *South African Journal of Science*. “Cocaine was recorded in Europe 200 years ago, never this early,” he said. He was also excited about the cannabis. Hemp was widely used for ropes and even printing Shakespeare’s early works, but there was little evidence that it was smoked. “Apparently no chemical analyses have been undertaken to determine what substances other than tobacco may have been smoked in England during the 17th century,” he said. “Was hemp used as a hallucinogen in Elizabethan times?” he asked. One of the arguments supporting the theory that Shakespeare was a dope-head and a genius is his work. “The Bard uses complex imagery of darkness, poison and such, as in Sonnet 27, “a journey in his head” Dr Thackeray said, with even the dark lady of the sonnets a possible reference to the creative but dangerous forces of drugs. “In Sonnet 76 he refers to the ‘invention of a noted weed’ which may have been a reference to cannabis,” he said. “In the same sonnet, he refers to ‘compounds strange’ and the word compounds is a known reference to drugs,” he said. “But I think Shakespeare, who may have experimented, is saying he would rather turn away from these substances. I would not read it as an endorsement of drug use.” The pipe fragments were examined using gas chromatography with the help of his co-author, Inspector Tommie van der Merwe of the South African Police Service’s Forensic Science Laboratory. They were loaned by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, which took issue with the slur on the playwright’s moral rectitude. “People love to come up with reasons for saying Shakespeare was not a genius,” Ann Donnelly, the curator, said. (*The Times*)



Mainstreaming the Left

MARITES SISON IN MANILA

Present-day Philippine politics were a boxing match, says an analyst here, it has now entered a crucial third round as the 14 May local elections near.

The first round was the impeachment trial on corruption charges against then President Joseph Estrada in December, which led to his ouster 20 January, says Ronald Llamas, campaign manager of the party-list group Akbayan which is taking part in the coming poll. The second round in the match, he adds, was the popular revolt against Estrada in the same place where Filipinos threw out former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, and which is now called the People Power 2 revolt.

The next political test—both for the less than two-month-old administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Philippine democracy—is the May elections, where over 17,000 seats from mayors to senators are up for grabs. “The elections will be a vote of confidence or no-confidence for Arroyo and her administration,” Llamas added. “We shall see if she can consolidate her

The emergence of left-wing parties is the latest in the Philippines’ long-running political saga.

political machinery not just for the next three years, but for 2004 when she runs for president. This will be an early presidential election for her,” he said.

Arroyo, who was Estrada’s vice president, took over the presidency from him in January, and will be president until his current term ends in 2004. The May poll has also encouraged new political groups to participate in the electoral process, an uphill battle in a political arena dominated by old names and families. The May vote will also test whether, after two successful, peaceful uprisings against unpopular governments, Filipino voters have wised up in choosing their leaders.

For groups like Llamas’ left-of-center Akbayan, the election offers a chance to mainstream a non-traditional political group into national politics. “If we get 1-2 million votes, we’re into

mainstream politics, we’re no longer marginalised or peripheral,” he said. The emergence of party-list groups has infused fresh hopes in an electoral system long dominated by political parties built on personalities rather than ideologies or policies. Traditional politics produced leaders like Estrada, a populist leader who won by a huge margin in 1998 but soon got bogged down in charges of corruption and incompetence, and even Arroyo.

During the impeachment trial against Estrada, many Filipinos said they were tired of politicians who offered promises but failed to deliver. Apart from Akbayan, among those who have joined the political fray are Bayan Muna (Country First), a newly-established party of militant groups dominated by leftist leaders. Political activist and former political detainee Satur Ocampo says the left, which has long shunned the electoral arena, is running in the party-list race for



pragmatic reasons. “It’s about time. In previous elections, despite our insistence that no meaningful change could result from elections, people continued to participate,” Ocampo wrote in the political magazine *Newsbreak*. “Most people still want elections.”

The idea, he says, is to mainstream the left. “We are mainstreaming it in national politics but at the same time it still offers change,” says Ocampo. “The administration slate is supposedly running on new politics. We want to show just what new politics is all about.” The decision to participate in the elections, which evolved after

heated debates, differs widely from the decision of leftist groups to stay away in previous elections after the Marcos era ended in 1986. These past decisions are seen to have isolated the left in sweeping political changes at the time.

Ocampo says many in the left also believe now that “political education has already made a lot of gains,” adding that “the people have reached a higher level of political awareness.” Sceptics say calls for new politics have been made time and again before, like in 1986. A motley group of candidates met the 28 February deadline for filing for candidacy. The list includes the

wife and son of Estrada, scions of incumbent politicians, former elected officials, former government appointees, some movie stars and a fugitive from US justice.

Many have the traditional tools of the Philippine political arena—big names, patronage systems and lots of money. For instance, Llamas says Estrada’s doctor-wife, Luisa Ejercito may gather enough “sympathy” or “underdog” votes as she runs for senator. There’s the added element of money, something Estrada and his party have plenty of. Infighting within Arroyo’s fractious People Power Coalition (PPC), as the ruling group is called, just months into her administration, is another factor. Arroyo must prepare for an election that will gauge her government’s popularity, even as she tries to gain legitimacy. Some Filipinos say they wanted Estrada out, but didn’t necessarily want Arroyo in—she was the constitutionally mandated successor, though.

“People are looking for alternatives and leadership,” said Llamas. “Many are neither pro-Estrada nor pro-Arroyo. If she wants to win as president in 2004, Arroyo has to prove herself worthy of the position accorded her by People Power 2.” ♦ (IPS)

OPINION

by CHUNG HLEE

Asia’s newpolitik



Finance and democracy are not twins. Yet parallels exist.

JAKARTA - Political crisis has replaced financial crisis in Southeast Asia. President Estrada of the Philippines, who never mastered his office, was removed in a bloodless coup aided by mob rule. Now Indonesia’s President Wahid faces possible impeachment; so, too, may Taiwan’s president. Thailand’s new prime minister assumed office surrounded by scandal, Malaysia’s politics seem more unsettled than at any time in twenty years.

Southeast Asia’s boom years are gone, but this is not to say that they have vanished forever, for the causes of this instability are not hidden. Today’s political turbulence, indeed, has the same roots as yesterday’s financial storms: inadequate, unsound, and unformed institutions. Unless these institutional gaps are addressed, Asian societies will not get back on track.

Of course, finance and democracy are not twins. Yet parallels exist: without the checks and balances of sound domestic institutions, the global winds of political liberalisation unsettle former authoritarian regimes, much as economic globalisation wreaked havoc on weak financial institutions. Indeed, important lessons can be drawn from Asia’s economic crisis of 1997-98 for today’s political tumult.

The irony of Asia’s economic crisis

was that it struck the “miracle” economies that maintained sound macroeconomic policies and carried out far-reaching financial liberalisation. What went wrong? Some analysts proclaim that liberalisation was “inappropriate” or “disorderly.” Something similar to this complaint is now made by critics who say that countries like Indonesia and the Philippines are too sprawling and undisciplined to adopt democracy.

The trouble in the 1990s arose out of an unexpected confluence of vulnerable domestic financial systems and volatile international capital movements brought about by the globalisation of financial markets. Rapid globalisation, however, came about only in part through technological advances. Another crucial factor was the notion—proved too simplistic in the event—that free capital movements can just replace capital controls. For a country to benefit from free international capital movements, however, it must have, *inter alia*, sound and strong financial institutions to prevent panic movements of capital and withstand systemic shocks if such movements occur.

The simplistic equation of financial liberalisation with financial deregulation was at the root of Asia’s crisis. Thailand, for instance,

established the Bangkok International Banking Facilities in the hope of becoming a regional financial centre, despite the fact that local financial institutions were ill prepared to handle massive flows of capital.

Nor are institutions the same as laws on paper. In comparison with Thailand, Indonesia had an adequate provision of prudential rules and regulations. But it lacked effective legal and accounting systems, so those rules and regulations could not be properly enforced.

The case of Korea is equally instructive. By 1997, Korea had “liberalised” its financial markets by eliminating government credit allocation and management of commercial banks. But financial sector reform made it possible for the *chaebols*, the large conglomerates that dominate Korea’s economy, to increase their control over non-bank financial institutions. Reform thus strengthened the *chaebols’* internal capital market and weakened the banks’ role as monitors of corporate behavior. Similarly, in the Philippines, financial liberalisation, by and large, benefited large family-owned corporations, increasing their monopoly power by easing access to bank credit.

Southeast Asian policymakers are not the only people responsible for paying insufficient attention to establishing institutions necessary for a free-market financial system and the neglect of the danger of regulatory capture. The West and international institutions also played a pervasive role by promoting the so-called Washington Consensus that defined economic orthodoxy in the decade preceding Asia’s crisis, which has continued ever since. “The pictorial symbol” of the Washington Consensus, quipped C Fred Bergsten, “was the colonial posture assumed by the Managing Director of the IMF as the President of

Indonesia....signed his *diktat*.”

Much as the Washington Consensus focused on financial liberalisation, deregulation, free capital movements, privatisation, and stable macroeconomic policy as the keys to development, today’s political consensus is on free elections and the political empowerment of the hitherto oppressed, without sufficient attention being paid to the institutional underpinnings of democracy, such as a functioning judicial system, an infrastructure of political parties, and other constitutional arrangements.

The effects may be equally sobering. The economic Washington consensus took for granted the presence of institutions necessary for functioning free-markets or assumed that once government intervention was removed such institutions would emerge. What actually followed, as countries embarked on financial liberalisation, was an institutional vacuum that, when combined with volatile international capital movements, incited crisis. Today, liberalisation of the political system, without strengthening its ability to absorb the shocks of political struggle, seems to incite instability, too.

The lessons of Asia’s financial crisis and its current political crisis seem clear: in economics, removing government intervention without establishing needed institutional preconditions may deliver crisis, not growth; in politics, credible institutions to check and balance each other are as vital to democratic stability as the ballot box. Here a hopeful sign in today’s political travails is found in the potent role played by Southeast Asia’s once tame press in reporting corruption scandals. For independent media is a vital institutional check far too often absent across the Pacific. Other powerful institutions, however, must take root for democracy to function properly. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

The author is Professor of Economics, University of Hawaii at Manoa and visiting professor, European Institute of Japanese Studies, Stockholm School of Economics

Cinema hall wars

ISLAMABAD - After fighting over Kashmir on the diplomatic front for decades, Pakistan and India have taken their dispute into film theatres. A series of films released in the past few months by the Pakistani film industry—Lollywood—have themes centred on alleged human rights excesses by Indian security forces against the people of Indian-administered Kashmir.

Not all associated with Pakistan’s film industry agree that the medium should be used for political purposes. “We should use the popular medium of films to reduce rifts and differences among people,” says Ejaz Gul, managing director of the government-run National Film Development Corporation. He believes that films have potential to create wars. Journalist Najeem Haider Zaidi, who works with a Pakistani news agency, agrees: “Peace is not an isolated effort made by governments.”

But a large number of cinema viewers in Pakistan think that Lollywood’s new productions, *Terey Piyar Mein* (In your love) and *Musalman* (Muslim), are a fitting response to similar films made by the Indian film industry. *Terey Piyar Mein*, which has been in



playing since December 2000, is about an Indian Sikh woman who falls in love with a Pakistani man during a visit to Sikh holy shrines in Pakistan. Her Pakistani lover follows her to India, where he is caught by an Indian army officer, also in love with the woman. The film ends with Kashmiri militants helping the Pakistani escape and cross into Pakistan with the woman.

In keeping with the Pakistan government’s allegations against Indian security personnel in Kashmir, the film shows the Indian army officer torturing the Pakistani man in jail. “I am glad that Pakistan has finally started using cinema for rousing feelings of nationalism in the young people,” says Begum Tasadduq, an elderly woman who watched the film in Islamabad. “The government should patronise such efforts that portray the true feelings of the Pakistani nation,” she adds. She was referring to the high popularity of Indian films *Roja*, *Border*, *Mission Kashmir* and *Refugee* in the Pakistani home video market. These films are banned on the grounds that they are “Indian propaganda”, but are rented out secretly.

Terey Piyar Mein is not producer Shahzad Gul’s first effort to cash in on anti-India sentiment in Pakistan. A year ago he produced the highly successful *Ghar Kab Aaogey* (When will you return home?) that dealt with subversive activities, allegedly carried out by Indian intelligence agencies in Pakistan. Gul did not mention that he was helped by the Pakistani Army’s Inter Services Press Relations department. *Terey Piyar Mein* was also made with the technical support of the military’s public relations department. The military’s press relations wing has also given financial and technical help to state-run Pakistan Television in the filming of the popular drama series *Angaar Wadi*, (the valley of flames), which deals with the operations of the Indian security forces in Kashmir. (IPS)

It's protocol, stupid



(Excerpts from interview with Taranath Ranabhat, Speaker of the House of Representatives) Ghatana Ra Bichar, 28 February

Q Parliamentary sessions have been stalled. How do you view this situation?

A This calls for serious thinking. The events taking place, not allowing the House to function properly, are of grave concern. I consider myself a serious politician too, and therefore I think the present happenings are not good and will send out a very bad picture to the people.

Q What do you think is the way out of the present situation?

A The only way out, as I see it, is for a dialogue among all parties concerned. There is no other way out.

Q It seems a dialogue has failed. Now what?

A I do not think the dialogue has failed, none of the concerned parties have said so. Also, it has not reached a point where the problems are intractable. I am trying to get the different parties to sit down for a dialogue—I have met leaders of the opposition and leaders of my own party in this regard. Even the PM is keen on a dialogue. Everyone is worried, even the opposition.

Q What is the view of the opposition?

A Well, they are still sticking to their earlier demands. They too want an end to this problem. They too are worried, but it is not too late yet. If the ruling party and the opposition get together and hold a dialogue, then everything will be solved. This will benefit the country and parliament.

Q Do you think the present parliamentary session will end now?

A I do not think such a situation will arise. We are the officials who can call for or adjourn parliament.

Q If parliament goes into recess in such a situation, what will happen?

A That will be of no benefit for the country or democracy. If parliament does not meet in a democracy, then it becomes a peculiar event. From all points of view, parliament must sit in session, and every party should be serious about this. We have to get parliament working and functional nevertheless.

Q On one hand parliament is not functioning, and on the other the royal seal has not been applied to bills passed by parliament. What is your opinion?

A Recently, a newspaper article accused me of being guilty with regard to the status of the Citizenship Bill. If I am termed guilty in a personal manner, there is no harm, but calling the Speaker guilty is problematic. Only a person who has not read the constitution will call a Speaker guilty. On the issues of ordinances, the constitution has provided a lot of power to the Speaker. At present, the Supreme Court is discussing the bill in question. Therefore, I cannot comment on it.

Guilty until proven innocent



(Excerpts from interview with Bharat Mohan Adhikari, standing committee member of CPN-UML.) Sanghu, 26 February

Q Can't you remove the prime minister through a vote of no confidence, which is a constitutional process?

A A vote of no confidence is a political issue. We are not saying that a Congress government should not be formed. We strongly believe that since the Congress has a majority in parliament, they should form the government. Corruption is a civil case. This is an accusation against a person. Since the PM is involved in a case of corruption, we demand that he resign on moral grounds. If the courts declare him innocent, he can return and we will welcome him. But just having a majority does not mean that you can do everything and anything that pleases you.

Q Why can't you gather dissatisfied MPs of the Congress and move a vote of no confidence?

A To save this country from corruption and to save democracy, everyone has to come together. We have been telling the Congress that they should not shelter people involved in corruption, people who have civil cases filed against them. It is a case of corruption, and action should be taken, regardless of who is involved. We must all protest this and take action. The help of MPs from all parties is necessary for this.

Q If the PM does not resign, what is the alternative?

A The stand taken by the PM is against the working of a democratic parliamentary system. This will create more problems in the long run for the country, democracy and the people. There is no alternative for the PM, and all he can now do is resign. If he persists with the type of behaviour he has shown, then this will only create more problems. If he is innocent, he can go to the CIAA, give his statement and return. If he is proved innocent we will welcome him. He is only creating more problems for himself and the country in the coming days. He should take this seriously. It will be beneficial for him.

Q Will you be able to remove him by taking to the streets if all other means fail?

A After being involved in the Lauda issue Koirala should resign. We have raised this issue in parliament.

"Having a majority does not mean that you can do everything and anything that pleases you."

Maoists want monarchy

Veteran communist leader Mohan Bikram Singh in Budhabar, 28 February



After the second national convention of the Maoists, it appears that there have been changes in their line of thought and that they have chosen a new path, what they have called the "Prachanda Path".

To this end they want certain demands to be met—the end of the constitution, the end of the parliamentary system and the end of the elected government. It therefore seems that the Maoists are bent on strengthening the hands of the monarchy. They have made the monarchy the centre of their demands, and if the above demands are met, it means that there will be only one force left in the country—the monarchy. Therefore it seems that the Maoists are working on behalf of the monarchy and are willing to do anything to strengthen that institution. It seems that they want the monarchy to take power and rule the country.

The protection of the present parliamentary system or the constitution is not our present concern, nor is it of the Maoists being finished off. If the present system is finished off and the monarchy rules the country, then there will be a new system in place and that is what concerns us. There will be a new dictatorship and that is why protection of the present system is of utmost concern. If what the Maoists want prevails, the monarchy will be all-powerful and



there will be no other players left.

The direction taken by the second convention of the Maoists points to their downfall and also demonstrates how low they are prepared to stoop to fulfill narrow self-interests. They have stated that they are prepared to get together with any party to form an interim government. This means that they are prepared to join hands with the Congress, the RPP or the NSP to form an interim government. This further means that they are prepared to join hands with reactionary forces and are impatient to get into government. This exposes the characteristics, thoughts and the opportunistic behaviour of their leadership. Not only are they prepared to accept the leadership of the monarchy, but are also prepared to join hands and form a government with reactionary forces.

If this is not a big political downfall in the name of revolution or People's War, what is it then? Anyone can figure that out. We humbly ask the Maoists: "Is it for these very reasons that they sacrificed their members?" The

biggest tragedy is that this new path has been called the "Prachanda Path". This shows how shameless they are. It shows how much they have fallen. Amazingly, they have presented Prachanda Path in the same league as Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. This shows capitalist and downtrodden behaviour. It is anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist and anti-Maoist. Is it in any way going to make them rightists in the long run? Or is their long-term goal geared towards becoming rightists?

The press has reported how Maoists have been praising Prachanda and Prachanda Path for some time now. Are they now following a personality cult and worshipping one person? Is this what they have fought for? This seems to be the beginning of the downfall of the Maoists.

South Asian Soviet Federation

Budhabar, 28 February



It is necessary to analyse some of the main points in Comrade Prachanda's paper presented at the second convention of the Maoists held recently. Firstly, the national convention accepted the fact that the paper presented by Prachanda not only provides direction to the communist forces in Nepal but that the manifesto also provides new direction to all communist forces in the world. It is a broad paper, they said, and applicable to all leftist forces.

Second, the paper not only tries to unite various communist forces in Nepal, it also provides direction for communist forces in the 21st century. This paper has the force to take forward not only the revolution in Nepal but is also capable of taking forward a revolution of the whole world. Third, it accepts the fact that there were some hindrances to the communist system because of deficiencies in the thinking of Stalin and that these deficiencies hurt communist movements to an extent. Fourth, it accepts that the revolution taking place worldwide will put in place a new system, unlike any that we have seen so far. Fifth, it declared that the people's war and revolution would have to take a new turn, change to an extent and evolve into a new model. Sixth, that the theory of greater India being pushed forward by some Indians will have to be helped along for a "South Asian Soviet Federation" to come into existence. Seventh, it declared that no party or grouping will be accepted as a party and that this will be done on the basis of the political direction provided by the communist movement. Eighth, Prachanda Path was accepted, and placed on the same plane as Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. Lastly, the need to form local area governments and the need to carry the revolution forward was recognised.

A dangerous point put forth by the Maoists in their second convention is the formation of a "South Asian Soviet Federation". The Maoists used to call themselves nationalist, but by advocating the idea of a South Asian federation they have proved themselves to be slaves of Indian Imperialists. To talk of a Soviet federation is to prove that you are a slave of the Indians. In whatever way you look at it, this thought of the Maoists is giving birth to a new Lendup Dorje

[the former chief minister of Sikkim instrumental in the Indian annexation of the Himalayan kingdom].

The Maoists have accepted the fact that the model of the revolution needs change to some extent and have agreed that the new model will be similar to the one espoused by Comrade Madan Bhandari eight years ago. This shows that the Maoists are flexible in their thoughts and working to a certain extent—they accept the fact that revolution will not have a fixed model, but at the same time their saying that the people's revolt is an integral part of the revolution is only going to drive them in circles and is not going to improve their image.

The second convention has shown that there will be centralisation of thought and force in the people's war even as it is said there will have to be new thinking on the political and war fronts. What the latter will be has not been spelt out. They ask a question but do not provide an answer. Instead, all that the papers show is that they will continue with their present thinking and actions, which seems to contradict the new thinking that they plan to incorporate in their models. There is nothing new except that a personality cult seems to be taking root, and they want Prachanda to be the president of some state that might be formed of some areas in the new "Soviet federation" they want to form. This is a brief analysis of the second convention of the Maoists.

Maoist red corner for inspector

Janadesh, 27 February



The Maoist people's court issued a 35-day warrant against police inspector Govind Pariyar in Ramidadda yesterday. Inspector Pariyar has been asked to report to the people's court within 35 days. In mid-January, 6 out of a total of 9 people coming from Dolpo were arrested with 65 kgs of hashish. The arrested were sent to the district police headquarters. One among them, Dhan Bahadur Thapa, ran away with 25 kilograms of the contraband and hid it in the house of one Singh Bahadur Gharti. Inspector Pariyar was informed by Chandra Bahadur Khadka and Bal Bahadur Khadka of the whereabouts of the hidden contraband. Pariyar then got together with Tilak Bahadur Thapa and Lal Bahadur Thapa and sold the 25 kgs of charas.

The Maoist people's court got wind of this and a case was filed in the people's court. A couple of those involved were arrested by the Maoists, and the role of inspector Pariyar clearly established. Those arrested were released on bail after posting a security of Rs 20,000 each. The Maoist forces are on the look out for Pariyar and if arrested he will be released only after posting Rs 200,000. The people's court has made this notice public and has asked Pariyar to report within 35 days. If he does not present himself within 35 days, then his property will be attached and the court may be forced to sell his property to recover the surety amount. Orders have been given to the Maoist forces to arrest Pariyar immediately.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The possibility of re-election 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. Punarjagaran. 27 February Tuesday



The sign says: Prachanda Path.

Janadesh, 6 March 2001

ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

- ❖ **Guhaar!** Written and directed by Deependra Gauchan and Leena Vihtonen, Guhaar! (Help!) is an entertaining TV series that brings together a communication expert from Europe and Thul Didi from a Nepali village. Together, they start making videos. 11 March, Sunday, 9.30am–5pm. Russian Culture Centre. Free lunch and morning and afternoon tea. Sponsored by Finnish Embassy. Organised by the Inter-Cultural Film Society. Reserve a spot on email icfs@wlink.com.np or ring Prem Basnet at 481659, or Susi Groeli at 537551
- ❖ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

EATING OUT

- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Exotic coffee and delicious Nepali food** at Jatra that houses a café, a dark room, craft shop, and an art gallery. End of Saat Ghumti, Thamel. www.jatranepal.com. 433859
- ❖ **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 Café, 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 rug woven in Tibet. 24 February—25 March. Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 413580
- ❖ **Euphoria** The fifth solo exhibition of Pradeep Yonzon, one of Nepal's few experimental photographers. Sunaula Hall, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. Organised by the Chomolungma UNESCO Centre and Soaltee Crowne Plaza. Until 14 March. Everyday from 10am–6pm. 428392

MUSIC

- ❖ **Peter Rowan live** Two-time Grammy nominee bluegrass musician whose career spans 35 years. One of Bill Monroe's original "Bluegrass Boys", the band that lent its name to this genre of music. Rs 750, and a portion of the proceeds will be donated to charity. Italian buffet dinner at the Patan Museum Cafe 6-7pm for an additional Rs 450. Reservations must be made by Wednesday 5pm. Saturday, 10 March 7pm Patan Museum Courtyard. For tickets and reservations, contact Ajit Thapa or Rabindra Thapa at Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 413580

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

- ❖ **Rescheduled Son et Lumiere** at the Ram Mandir, Battisputali. Please bring your tickets dated 24 February. Only the performance is rescheduled, not the dinner. Further info at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ❖ **Poetry reading** Young poets read original work in Nepali and English. Open house. Thursday 8 March, 4pm. Jatra, Saat Ghumti, Thamel. 433859
- ❖ **Health Expo 2001** at Bhrikuti Mandap, Exhibition Road. 11am-7pm, 8 March. Entrance Rs 20 for adults and Rs 10 for children. 632770.

MARTIN CHAUTARI

- ❖ **"Women and sexuality in Nepali art"**. Discussions led by Ashmina Ranjit, a contemporary Nepali female artist. Participation open to all. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali. 13 March 246065, Fax: 240059

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

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QUICKWORD 23

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Across

- 1 Playthings, and thongs (4)
- 2 Stuff quilts are made of (4)
- 9 Mesopotamia neo (4)
- 10 Bin Ezra for one (5)
- 11 Concoction inventory (4)
- 12 Life as a tale, teller: _____ (5)
- 13 Has 32 words for ice (6)
- 15 Nuclei material (3)
- 16 A yam _____ two rocks (7)
- 18 Barman, or Morse perhaps (7)
- 21 A pea for your simian thoughts (3)
- 22 Loved Dorothy to death (6)
- 26 Pub unfriendly (5)
- 28 Exploding star, quieting down (4)
- 29 Prefers these kinds perhaps (5)
- 30 Dangerously Close Liaisons (4)
- 31 Mother's threat, "or _____!" (4)
- 32 Angry and hurting (4)

Down

- 1 The Old Father waits for no one (4)
- 2 Origins of the lustre (4)
- 3 Rein in yak sharply (4)
- 4 Several dampers (6)
- 5 Good, in Harlem perhaps (3)
- 6 Play by the rule (5)
- 7 Steak-like Walker (5)
- 8 Colossal clasher (5)
- 10 What lumps here did after Christmas (6)
- 14 Improves the road, incompletely (6)
- 17 Transformed rights (6)
- 18 Algorithm format (5)
- 19 The cruellest month (5)
- 20 Hits a high (5)
- 23 Roll-over, rolled over (4)
- 24 Omega, and on (4)
- 25 Great mutt of Europe (4)
- 27 Just a little one (3)

QUICKWORD ANSWER 22



Of the eight correct entries, the lucky winner is **Pravin Lama**.



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.

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Of divine street walkers

Gods no longer walk the streets of Kathmandu, or if they do, there is an insufficiency of powerful tantrics to recognise them, or perhaps the cosmopolitan crowds make recognition impossible.

Indra, the Lord of Heaven, himself visited Kathmandu to steal flowers from a garden for his mother's devotions, but was discovered and taken captive. While his elephant searched the city for him, his mother descended from heaven to find her son, and when she disclosed to the people who their prisoner was there was much apology, much rejoicing and the inevitable asking for a boon.

Probably the last occasion of deities mingling with humans in Kathmandu was in the early seventeenth century when the celestial tree Kalpavriksha, came in human form to witness a festival. A

wily tantric saw through his disguise and bound him with a spell which he was prepared to break if Kalpavriksha promised wood from the celestial tree from which to build a large building. The promise was made and kept. A huge three-floor pagoda building of unusual design was constructed perhaps as a monastery or *dharamshala* or a temple, no one is quite sure. Certainly it was never consecrated, though today there is an image of Gorakhnath at the centre of the ground floor.

Gorakhnath was a great Shivaite sage who is connected with many wondrous legends. By meditating at the entrance to the hole of the Serpent King, who brought rain to the valley, he caused great drought and pestilence. Centuries later, he was meditating in a cave below the palace of the Gorkha, when the child Prithvi Narayan Shah, who

was to become the first king of undivided Nepal, interrupted him. The sage rose to meet the boy and regurgitated in his hands, commanding the boy to eat. The young prince refused and dropped the mess to the ground where it splashed his feet.

If he had eaten as commanded, the saint said, there would have been nothing the prince couldn't have achieved. However, since the sacred vomit had touched his feet, they would lead him to success wherever they went, a prophecy that came true. Gorakhnath today is patron saint of the king and Gurkhas.

Not only was the wood from the celestial tree sufficient to build a large house at the very centre of Kathmandu but there was enough left over with which to construct several other houses in the area. They all stand to this day, at their centre the Kashta Mandap, the house of wood, from which the city of Kathmandu is supposed to have taken its name.

All three storeys are open sided with railed balconies on which wandering ascetics or pilgrims could rest. On the first floor are two panels that illustrate the life of the Buddha, which suggest a Buddhist beginning. However, in the valley of Kathmandu, Buddhism and Hinduism coexist so closely that from the time it was built, between 1620 and 1639, the house of wood was probably intended for people of all beliefs.

There are, in close proximity to



Gods no longer walk the streets of Kathmandu, or if they do, there is an insufficiency of powerful tantrics to recognise them.

the Kashta Mandap, a dwelling for Buddhist priests with a stunning painted door at its entrance, several votive Buddhist *chaityas*, great stone Garuda and Hindu temples, the most famous of which is the Ashok Binayak, worshipped by both Hindus and Buddhists.

Strangely, this entirely gilded temple has no finial: it is open to the skies in commemoration of two beliefs. One is that the shrine was originally under an Ashoka tree

which grew out of its roof. The other is that Ganesh was seen levitating under the tree and so the temple made provision for him to come and go through the roof.

Whatever the real reason, there it stands today, within a few feet of the Kashta Mandap and considered so sacred that the king comes in procession to pray there immediately after his coronation at the old palace, a short distance away. The present king walked to

the shrine while thousands watched from the high plinths of temples near the Kashta Mandap.

Indians know the Kashta Mandap well. It was where, in the film *Hare Rama, Hare Krishna*, Zeenat Aman danced while assorted hippies pulled on *chillums* and the famous *Dum Maro Dum* was born. ♦

Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, Harper Collins, 1994.



Kashtamandap (left) and surrounding structures

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA



SOCIETY AND SENTIMENT Shyamal

Society and private sentiment find equal place in the work of poet Shyamal: his commentaries on social injustice are deeply personal, and their expressions of suffering are firmly grounded in the injustices which shape Nepali society. The two poems translated below are excerpted from his 1987 collection *Tapainharu Marfat*. Written against Panchayat repression, the first poem voices a scathing critique of artists who work as apologists for power—a critique just as timely today.

Last Night

Soldiers dressed in commands
were marching through our courtyard
We couldn't sleep last night
Acclaimed poet of this country!
Perhaps you haven't awakened yet from stupor
In your poems we expected something
sought something understood nothing
We couldn't even close our eyes last night

At an hour of desperate suffering
we lit dry twigs at the windows
Perhaps you had a gala to attend?
Acclaimed poet!
Perhaps you had a secret engagement?
Silent night
and the thick shoes of soldiers

This is what we thought all night as the weapons went mad
The still courtyard where these children now crawl
and the black shoes of brutal soldiers
We walked away from the strain of our fears and the future
Last night we couldn't sleep at all
During that long nighttime
perhaps you had an old friend to catch up with?
Or were you taking cover in some corner?
What was ringing in our sky at night?

What was the colour of the sky last night?
Perhaps you were seeking immortality
placing such words on a hangman's rope?
There was a parade of black cats in the kitchen
and in the bedroom apparitions
The top floor of the house was like a stadium
last night
there was a parade of ghouls in the libraries
and your poems in the wind
Perhaps you had some business to tend to?

To spend nights beneath black coverings
How frightening! How frightening!
The night is deepening now, too
This is what we're thinking
The terrain that a mother's hand touches
is being erased in the silent night
is turning invisible
Uneasily today too
we light dry twigs at the windows
Again, poet! Again, the same condition
Oh! Silent night
and the hard shoes of soldiers

The second poem, below, is equally chilling in tone. A world-weary narrator observes, with love and anguish, a girl at the cusp of womanhood. With conflicted, dissonant tones, he augurs the life of victimization that lies ahead of the young woman, and the state of emotional paralysis that perhaps lies ahead of him.

A Poem in my Sister Neelam's Name

When hope shatters to pieces
dreams slide off cliffs
the make of life starts unraveling like a sweater
and after the design is marred no one remains
yearnings set alight and the mind starts to burn....
All you have right now are dreams

and realities that flee like when I call you
You have no citizenship now
only visions of placing your footsteps on flowers
When eagles' claws pounce instead on
your movement of doves swimming in air
When questions come to you as to others
your dreams become as misshapen as your country
When the loneliness of harrowing nights lingers in you....
All you have right now are rays of moonlight
which set the whole earth aquiver
Neelam! Where you live right now the ill-omened calls
of wolves and kites are a far way off
If they were to close in, drumming against the ear
what a pity! Your disposition would be caged
in screeches that shake the whole settlement
Right now you rarely suffer nightmares
My younger sister Neelam!
The fleeting pace of your steps as I call you
would bring me such solace
if it were used to crush malign paws
Your laughter right now – ah!
How pleasurable it would be for me if
impenetrable towers were to catch on fire
When situation places her ruthless marks on you
if you could become a pride of lions and
mangle her ugly hands, ah! Then we might
sit by the edge of the courtyard and share stories
But all you have right now are
raw pencil marks in your accounts book
The torments remaining with you are imperceptible now
Must I keep loving you without speaking a single kind word
Buds are blossoming in your mind right now
You have with you unknown bruises
and visions of dancing on beds made of flowers

Today, Shyamal ranks prominently among a number of creative figures that Nepal has sacrificed to NGOs, INGOs, private businesses and other well-paying enterprises. This is a great loss. Originally from Dailekh, and now working for the UNDP in Nepalgunj, Shyamal is steeped in the complex realities of rural Nepal. His language is among the most sophisticated in Nepali letters. Frankly, the UNDP might better serve the country by giving him six months' paid leave each year to contribute to the creative life of the nation.

Mother of

all marathons

RAMYATA LIMBU

On 13 February, forty runners will set off on what is described as the mother of all marathons in the Himalaya—the Annapurna Mandala Trail 2001. Recognised as one of the most demanding races in the world, competitors, equipped with only a backpack and counting on local hospitality, will take off from Besi Sahar, Lamjung, at 820m, and make their way around the Annapurnas in eight days—a journey that usually takes two weeks.

International competitors, including four Nepali athletes, one of them last year's winner Nar Bahadur Shah, will run along rice paddies at 800m and go as high up as the Thorong La (5,416 m) in Manang. The impressive 2,700 metres of combined altitude difference is a challenge that runners will have to endure on the trail.

"The competitors will have a day to acclimatise at Manang village before they make their way up to the pass," says event

"To run over the Annapurnas with only a backpack and local hospitality to rely on is the definition of the Annapurna Mandala Trail"—Bruno Poirier, French trail runner.

organiser Padam Ghaley, who organised a similar run with the French trail runner Bruno Poirier last year. "At Thorong Phedi (4,400 m), medics from the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) post in Manang will make sure they are medically fit before they attempt the run up to the pass. If they're given a clean bill of health, they will be allowed to continue."

The Annapurna Marathon is considered more taxing than the Everest Marathon (a one-day event that begins from Gorak Shep at 5,184 m down to Namche at 3,446 m—a horizontal distance of 40 m). Just being fit and acclimatised aren't the only requirements runners have to fulfil in the Annapurnas. Runners have to sign the Racer

Solidarity Assistance chart, stipulating assistance to any endangered fellow racer—the slightest lapse will mean instant elimination. "The Annapurna Mandala Trail is real competition but in the spirit of solidarity of the mountain people," says Mandala Trekking's Ghaley, who plans to organise a one-day Sankhu to Kathmandu Darbar Square marathon early next year.

This time his team of more than 24 sirdars and Sherpas will get their fair share of exercise, too. "Not only do they have to cover the distance but they also have to follow international standards of timing, control and assistance, combined with the efficiency and dedication that have made Nepal's mountain people world famous," he says. While runners are expected to run from one place to another without assistance, thus preserving the spirit of the mountain trail in its simplest form, a technical team and light medical support will be provided by running doctors and nurses in collaboration with the Himalayan Rescue Association and Fishtail Air.

And, to wash off the sweat, each runner will get a cake of biodegradable chemical-free soap—courtesy of a Euro-Nepal soap manufacturing venture. ♦



PADAM GHALEY

Marathon man crosses a snowbound GhorePani Pass with Dhaulagiri in the background and, left, winners of the 1999 marathon Nar Bahadur Shah (3rd from left), Pascal Beaury (4th from left) and Babu Raja Shrestha (extreme left).

PADAM GHALEY

SURYA



MIN BAIRACHARYA

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

he sentient population of this country is divided between loathing Holi, *Fagu Purnima*, and loving it, seeing it as a chance to get back at someone—anyone—and vent their mixed feelings about the state of the world. The almost complete annihilation of cultural significance aside, Holi is slowly becoming more aggressive and appears to require a large-scale deployment of dermatologists. If you think you're a Wild Party Animal on Holi, smearing everyone in sight with colour and hitting them with those lethal little water balloons, *lolas*, think again. Lab tests on two of the most common colours, *abir* (red and yellow) reveal high percentages of toxic heavy metals like chromium, cadmium,

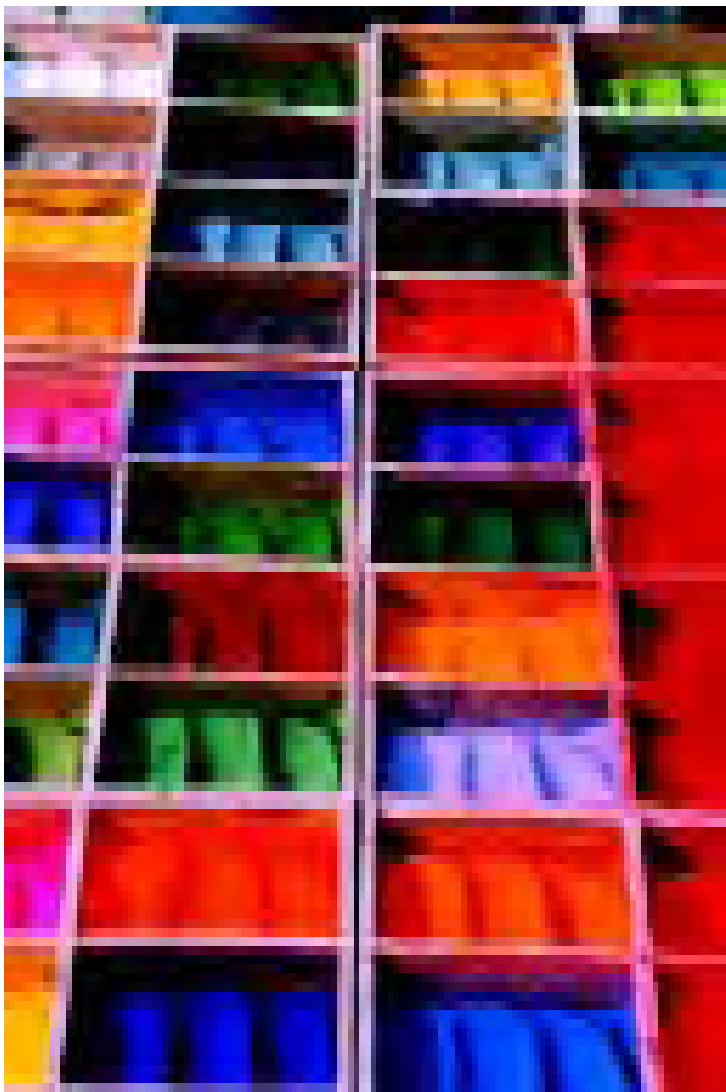
lead, nickel, and even traces of mercury. Some of these can leave permanent harmful traces in the body if inhaled or ingested, others cause skin irritation and eye infections. Krishna Kasaju and Mohan Kasaju are a father-son duo involved in selling colour and paint for the past 25 years. They have a little shop in Bangemudha where they sell colours and paint of every kind. "We used colour in our day too, but not like today, when kids use just any paint," says the older Kasaju. Asked whether they knew if metallic colours were harmful Manoj Kasaju replies: "We know they are, but what can we do about it? It is the customer's will." The colours used today are cheaply produced in factories in

If forcing people into celebrations wasn't bad enough, the contents of flying *lolas* this week are a case for chemical weapons inspectors.

India and do not conform to any standards. Our investigation showed that there is no official monitoring of these chemicals. Says Dr Jaya Prasad Baral, a dermatologist: "Some of the colours can cause skin irritation but it depends on the amount of toxic chemicals in the colour." For women, getting poisoned isn't the only cause for concern. The sheer wretchedness of the South Asian male finds numerous creative outlets on this day. *Fagu Purnima* literally means 'the full moon of the month of Fagun'. Among other things, the festival ushers in the joys of spring. Spring is all very fine, but the associations of virility appear exaggerated in the minds of many, who use the day as a free-for-all grope-fest. Stories abound of women, especially foreigners, being physically abused by unruly crowds of *bhang*-intoxicated youth and fights erupting between groups throwing gutter water at each other. For many women holi is a terrifying experience. "It's fine playing on the day itself, but guys start throwing *lolas* many days before the actual holi. This is sad because they throw them with such force that it hurts terribly," says Shovna Shrestha of Patan. "It is harassment, but people don't understand," she adds. Laura Gilchrist, a Britisher resident in Kathmandu for two years, says she doesn't budge from the house on Holi.

It wasn't always like this. The Hindu scriptures, the *Puranas*, say that Holika, a legendary demoness, was burnt to death on this day. Although she had this nifty power of being resistant to fire, she was burnt to death when she leapt into

a pyre with Prahlad, her (pious) nephew who refused to accept his father Hiranyakasyapa as the most powerful creature on earth. Other legends have the young Krishna playing pranks on Radha and her friends in the forests of Vrindaban during this season—clearly the inspiration of wannabe Krishnas today, who see sexual harassment as justified by religion. Anyway, for a long time, the full moon day in the month of Fagun has been celebrated as the victory of good over evil, the beginning of spring, and a celebration of life. People in the tarai conduct religious ceremonies on the evening of the full moon, burning effigies of Holika and celebrate the day after, people in the hills celebrate on the first day. And yes, in the good old days, the colours used were vegetable extracts. For the Thakalis of the Thak Saatsaya region in lower Mustang, *Fagu Purnima*, or *Toran La*, as they call it, has its own significance. Here, *Toran La* is even more important than Dasain. The festivities begin a day before the actual full moon and continue till the day after. Like at Dasain, family members gather together from all over and make merry. The men still wear the traditional *labeda suruwaal* with raw silk turbans and women the *nbukun chollo*, the traditional Thakali female dress. An astounding variety of food items are cooked. The men participate in archery competitions and the women play *paana* (cowries) and *kai*, a pebble-picking game. The Thakali Samaj Ghar in Kathmandu is trying to preserve these traditions, even if many of their members have permanently given up their ancestral homes in Thak Saatsaya. But the archery competitions are



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turning into serious gambling affairs, and the festivities don't seem as wholesome as before. Jyoti Sherchan, a former chairman of the Samaaj, fears the dominant "modern" pan-Nepali culture might slowly be wiping out his own. Says he: "The government needs to recognise *Toran La* as a festival of the Thakalis and give us an official holiday, like they do for Dasain." Likewise there are Nepal's few Sikhs,

who also celebrate *Fagu Purnima*, what they call *Hola Mohallab*, in a manner similar to the mainstream Hindu celebration, but mainly to strengthen communal harmony. Holi is a time for fun, colours and the ingestion of *bhang*, yes, but in the face of toxic colours, harassment and the homogenising of traditions, one wonders how long it will remain this way. ♦

HAPPENINGS



RAVI MANANDHAR

BACK HOME: King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya on their return to Kathmandu from a state visit to China, on 3 March.



RAVI MANANDHAR

AMONG CHILDREN: Queen Aishwarya chats with children after the inauguration of a new Canada-Nepal orphanage at Arubari, 5 March.



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NOT UNTOUCHABLE: Police get physical with Dalit demonstrators at Bhadrakali who were protesting delays in passing the Dalit Bill.

Sharp

Under My Hat
by Kunda Dixit

Nepali men are a bit insecure when it comes to food. Understandably so: they are so used to dal bhat and achar appearing automatically before them at mealtimes that they think food literally grows on trees; it doesn't, it grows in supermarkets. So when their wives threaten to go on strike demanding a ten percent service charge, there is in maledom a general sense of panic. It is time we men learnt to fend for ourselves. Men have to behave less like parasites and more like para-commandos and teach ourselves jungle survival techniques that will allow us to make fire with a magnifying glass so we can prepare a feast of roasted beetles, rustle up a fine fungus salad with Thousand Island dressing improvised from the body fluids of a carnivorous pitcher plant, and for our just desserts, do a mouth-watering soufflé of red ant abdomens in wild honey.

Obviously there is a long way to go for mama's boys in Nepal. They need to learn to lead a hand-to-mouth existence from everyday raw materials found around the house. I have been testing some of these recipes in the safety of my own kitchen, and they range from easy-to-do dishes to more exotic and ambitious concoctions, and I'm sure they will make my fellow men to be more self-reliant, self-confident and self-centred.

Chewing Gum
(To serve a party of one)
Ingredients:
A six pack of wrigleys or chiclets
3 fl oz of home-made Saliva
Remarks: When the first pangs of hunger hit you after your wife/mother/sister/aunt goes on strike, chewing gum (bubble gum will also do) is always an easy way to postpone starvation. In terms of fast food, gum constitutes an instant and gratifying meal that works by fooling the stomach that you are indeed eating something whereas in actual fact you are not. Thus tricked, the stomach goes to sleep and stops bothering you.



Water with Aromatic Garnishes
(To serve one hungry Nepali male)
Ingredients: 1 litre of Kathmandu Tap Water
Remarks: Another way to deal with a female-instigated famine within the household is to fill your belly with pure Himalayan tap water. Don't boil or filter this liquid otherwise you will lose valuable protein-rich nutrients like micro-organisms, plankton and other unidentified floating objects.

It has been shown that an average Nepali male chauvinist piglet does not really need food at all, but can live for the rest of his life on tap water since besides water it also contains enough hydrocarbons and amino acids to meet the per capita daily calorie requirement of all Nepalis, great and small.

Recipes for disaster

Instant Noodles with Spices
(For a family of six)
Ingredients: One 350 g plastic packet of noodles
One 3 oz sachet of spices
One sledgehammer
Remarks: Variety is the spice of life, and a daily diet of gum and water, however wholesome, can get a bit dull. This is when BuyBuy chow-chow from a neighbourhood pasal can come to the rescue. Tear open plastic pack with your teeth, pour out contents, and eat the little plastic eraser shaped like a Star Wars character that comes free with every packet of BuyBuy. My particular favourite is Darth Vader, which has a delicate vanilla flavour, and a chewy texture a bit like turkey meat.

Pulverise noodles with sharp blows from a handy kitchen sledgehammer, sprinkle spices to taste, toss lightly to let ingredients mix, lob into open mouth and munch noisily.

Boiled Eggs a la Murch
(Special Non-Veg Treat for Eggeatarians)
Ingredients: One egg, or chicken, whichever comes first.
Remarks: The Boiled Egg is a particular gourmet delight reserved for special occasions like Easter and Bishwakarma Puja. First make sure egg was laid by hen and not a velociraptor. Toss concerned egg into pot of water and heat over simmering flame. Careful, overheating may cause egg to hatch. Roll egg from time to time to ensure Thermal Equilibrium within the Epithelium.

When tapping from inside the shell stops, you can be sure chicken little is dead, and the treat is ready to serve to an appreciative circle of family and friends.

Supari with Semtex
Ingredients: One 25 g raw areca nut
One heavy-duty nutcracker
Three tons of Semtex explosives
Remarks: After a hearty meal, there is nothing like a deep burp and a supari to complete a traditional Nepali dinner. The problem is that a supari is so hard it needs a tunnel engineer to blast one into easy-to-eat pieces. I have it on good authority that the supari is a multi-tasking nut that works as an aphrodisiac, an astringent, an anthelmintic, an antihistamine, an anti-ulcer agent and even as an edible toothpick which dislodges bits of previously-ingested instant noodles from your molars.

In some parts of Nepal, people even get married to suparis. Speaking of which, at this point in time I am so hungry I could eat my spouse. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Shooting from a new angle



Tehrathum district. The roots of his passion go back to his school days when reading about people like Bhanubhakta and Laxmi Prasad Devkota aroused his curiosity—he wanted to see pictures of all these characters. “All we could see were sketches, no one had pictures.

I hope my collection of contemporary writers, musicians, artists and poets will help future generations to know more about those whose works they study,” says Ale. He leaves one class of dreamers untouched, though, politicians. And why black and white photography? “Black and white photographs preserve colour for a longer duration than colour pictures although they are more expensive to start with. And besides, black and white photographs look more artistic,” reasons Ale.

Kumar Ale has never exhibited his works. The only thing close was a compact disc with digital images of his works that he carried when he went to Europe several years ago. Exhibition or not, his works have inspired many to come up with new ideas. The poets he's captured have given him inventive names—some call him Chitara, some Photo Shikari.

He doesn't make much money from his pictures, but Ale isn't complaining. “I did not do this for money. This is purely personal. The only thing I hope to get out of this is that it may inspire others to be creative and use their imagination for a good cause.

” It's clear that what pleases him most is being able to inspire creativity. The Royal Nepal Academy had previously stowed away the portraits of many of Nepal's greatest writers owns. Today, drawing inspiration from Ale's work, they are on display. “Every creator should follow a certain line,” says Ale. He's certainly got the right angle. ♦

“Not everybody with a camera is a photographer. A photographer needs to have a vision and direction,” says Kumar Ale, one of Nepal's young photographers. And the man himself is no ordinary camera-slinger. Ale's approach to the profession makes him unique. For over ten years, Ale has been shooting Nepal's artists, litterateurs, poets and musicians, mostly in black and white.

“I vowed to capture at least one subject every day, not necessarily a famous personality,” says Ale. Today he has images of over 1,500 people, ranging from musician Amber Gurung, to poet Madhav Ghimire, to some whose names aren't widely known—yet. The most important thing about Ale's work is that his subjects don't have to pose. His pictures are taken when the subjects are going about doing whatever they do.

Ale is originally from Aathrai in

AMBASSADOR

WAVE