

9



19

## Parachute

## Mahat's report



## RAMYATA LIMBU IN DAMAK, JHAPA

The work should be simple: most refugees were intimidated or forcibly evicted between 1991-92, packed into trucks and taken across India to be dumped in eastern Nepal. They left behind homesteads where their ancestors had settled generations ago. Nearly one in every seven Bhutanese citizens is living in exile in Nepal, making this one of the most extensive (and least reported) refugee crises in the world.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

The population of the refugee camps has swelled by 17,000 since 1993. Not because of new refugees pouring in, but because of the

RAMYATA LIMBU

Bhutanese refugees have lost everything. All they have is that distant possibility of return.

*Beldangi I Camp (above)*

family, including unmarried people up to the age of 25, and elderly relatives or dependants. For security and logistical reasons, the joint team will bring the refugees from Khudunabari to Damak for identification from Monday. The leader of the Nepali team, Usha Nepal, is settling down for the long haul and refuses to answer detailed questions. "We don't want to jeopardise the process even before it begins," she tells us. "There's still a lot of logistics to work out."

The leader of the Bhutanese team, Sonam Tenzing, is also noncommittal: "Our presence in Damak means we're here to do business."

What is worrying some refugees is that even if the joint team begins interviews, at the most it can only manage ten heads of families on each working day. That would take at least five years to complete the process. Added to that is the fact that the forms to be filled out during the questioning are in English (as agreed to in the terms of reference for the Joint Verification Team), which could mean plenty of delays, and misunderstandings, while interviewing the predominantly Nepali-speaking refugees.

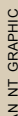
**⚡** contd. on p6

**BINOD BHATTARAI**

The marriage season in India saw only a dribble of honeymooners in Kathmandu and Pokhara, and it looks the same for April-May when Indians used to flee the heat of the plains by the thousand and fly up to Kathmandu. The monsoon months, which had stopped being a lean season for many Nepali hotels because of Indian tourists arriving, are not looking good either.

Nepali officials gave in, thinking this was a symbolic gesture and would assuage Indian paranoia about infiltration by Pakistani agents through Nepal—especially after the December 1999 hijacking of IC814. One senior Nepali diplomat told us: “The rule was made after several rounds of discussions, and we thought it would ultimately also be a step towards better border regulation.”

But what it has done in the short term is slow Indian arrivals to a trickle, since Nepal's main attraction for Indians was the ease of travel. "If you need passports, you may as well go to Dubai," said one Indian visitor who



frequents Kathmandu's casinos. Voter IDs are also a problem—not everyone has one, and even if they do, it is not handy. The result can be seen in the hassles passengers go through at immigration in Delhi, Bombay or Calcutta, where some have even been turned back after checking in for the flight to Kathmandu.

"There is reason to worry," says Raju Shrestha, assistant executive manager at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza. "We'll have a better idea of how bad things are when the Indian summer holidays begin in late-April." Conferences and incentives will be hit hardest. Another reason for Indians to come was the acceptability and strength of the Indian rupee here. Says one Darbar Marg travel agent: "They cannot just pick up their bags and head to the airport anymore."

The urgency of the issue seems to have finally dawned on the NTB, which is trying to start a three-month promotional blitz in India with special discounts. It is writing to Indian officials to specify the definition of identity cards, perhaps even include local photo IDs and driving licences.

Over 30 percent of the tourists visiting Nepal before December 1999 used to be Indian. And they were high-spenders who shopped, gambled and splurged on adventure outings like ultra-light flights and rafting. The hijacking, the cancellation of all Indian Airlines flights from Delhi, Calcutta and Banaras for the first five months of 2000, the negative publicity following the hijack and the Hritikh Roshan riots, and now the passport requirement have all taken their toll. From 8,865 Indian tourists in February 1999, we're down to 5,005 in February 2001. ♦





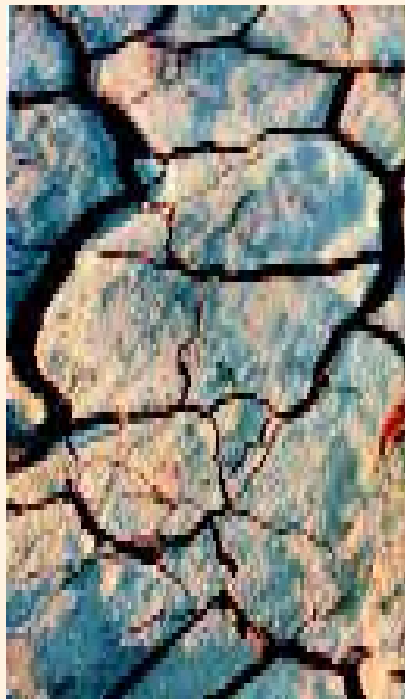
## WORLD No-WATER DAY

Unbeknownst to most of us, World Water Day came and went on 22 March without much fanfare. There were a few speeches, some seminars and more platitude. But we missed another chance to focus national attention on this precious resource which is going to determine our nation's economic growth, the health of Nepalis, and even political relations with our neighbours in the near future. It is becoming increasingly clear that although Nepal is regarded as a "water surplus" country, we suffer from huge shortfalls in the quantity and quality of water available. In many cases, this is a life and death issue: Nepal has one of the highest infant mortality rates in Asia and most of the deaths are caused by water-borne infections. Three-quarters of potentially irrigable farms are rain-fed, and the huge energy potential of falling water is largely wasted. The taps in most Kathmandu Valley households are dryer this spring than they have ever been, and the water table has fallen to record lows because of excessive pumping.

With such a glaring gap between supply and demand, it is tempting to look for quick-fix technical solutions to increase supply for Kathmandu. And because it is politicians who make these decisions, there are attractive pecuniary incentives for them to go for infrastructure solutions. (No one we know offers kickbacks for making water use more efficient.) But, as the world's foremost experts on freshwater resources, Peter Gleick, tells us on pages 10-11 of this issue, Nepal is ideally placed to make a paradigm shift in the way it looks at water from a demand-side approach. We can learn from the mistakes of others, and since we haven't started making colossal blunders yet, we are ahead of the curve.

Gleick comes from California which is a harbinger of trends for the rest of the world. And there, efficiency is the name of the game. (It's a different story that the rest of the United States hasn't yet followed suit.) Here in Nepal, our efforts to control emissions and use energy more efficiently have been governed by the principle of one step forward, two steps back.

Trying to harness water resources without first addressing the important issues of efficiency, pricing and conservation will lead us down the same path of wastage and over-consumption that have characterised developed countries. If Kathmandu Valley cut leakage and wastage of water, which is conservatively estimated at 50 percent, it would double the supply and provide 360 litres of water per tap per day in Kathmandu Valley. So where is the shortage?



## GREENER THAN THOU

Hunters, it is said, make the best conservationists. Conservationists, on the other hand, make bad hunters. So, if it is indeed true that the army brass has been conducting target practice on barking deer in Chitwan, then they are being very naughty. One of the reasons behind Nepal's dramatic success in protecting its national parks and nature reserves has been the deployment of the Royal Nepal Army on guard duty. It is because of this that we have been spared the rampant poaching that threatens tigers, rhinos and wild elephants in parks across the border in India. No one has any illusions that using an army to guard animals is a permanent solution. Ultimately the protection has to come freely from people who value the wildlife and their habitat. But our army's role in bringing Nepal's nature reserves back from the brink is probably the best use an army has been put to anywhere in the world.

Having said that, let us also remind our men in uniform that just because wild boar, deer or tahr are now more plentiful, that is no reason for conservationists to turn into hunters. And it does not behove the green image of the patrons of our environment that they are projected regularly in the media blazing away at migratory ducks from Siberia making a stopover on the shores of Phewa. And they need to be slightly more sophisticated and refrain from photo-ops while standing on snow leopard pelts in rooms bedecked with the dead heads of snarling rare cats.

Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd  
Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Pulchowk, Lalitpur  
Mailing address: GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Phones: (01) 543333-7 Fax: (01) 521013  
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Editorial: editors@nepalitimes.com  
Marketing, circulation and subscriptions: marketing@nepalitimes.com  
www.nepalitimes.com Printed at Jagadamba Press (01) 521393



## STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# In memory of hope

Where are you, all you doctors, engineers, artists and authors of the 1990 Kathmandu Spring? Where are you when the country needs you again?

In this all-pervasive gloom, it is getting increasingly difficult to keep the memory of March 1990 alive. But we must remember that Springtime of the People. It was a season of hope, an extraordinary time when Nepalis rose up spontaneously to express their determination to build a new future for themselves and their children.

On 16 March 1990 (3 Chaitra), Nepali litterateurs wore black bands over their mouths, marched through the streets and were hauled away in police trucks. A movement led by students was snowballing into a wider protest. Poets, novelists, artists, singers, theatre personalities breathed new life into the *Jan Andolan*. Those were the days when every little action mattered and even minor protests sent out powerful symbolic messages. Then the engineers, teachers, lawyers, medics, journalists, airline pilots, bankers, traders, industrialists, government employees, and even some members of the police took to the streets. In these jaded days of democratic decay when street protests have become so commonplace that people don't even notice them anymore, it takes some effort to recall how daring and heady those protests were.

Then on 20 March (7 Chaitra) a professional solidarity group organised a seminar in Kirtipur, another in a series of protests that were becoming routine in the Kathmandu Spring of 1990. It was in fact an assembly of techno-dissidents—legal eagles, academics, engineers, career consultants, physicians and journalists. They were there at Tribhuvan University not just to protest, but examine the possibility of alternatives. Those exhilarating discussions were disrupted as the regime panicked. The Kirtipur Seminar has now come to be remembered merely as one of numerous protests of the pro-democracy movement. But to my mind, it was a seminal event—the first to look beyond protests at possibilities, the first to discuss hope, not desperation. Even in those difficult times, people talked about the inevitable dawn that follows the night.

It's yesterday once more. This time, a crucial difference—instead of hope we have foreboding. There is ominous talk of the Ides of March. Everyone is protesting something, some are protesting everything, but the common denominator is that they are all 'against' something, not 'for' anything. The fundamentalists of Balkhu have issued a fatwa that the prime minister must resign, and these Stalinists think democracy means holding parliament to ransom to oust a legitimately elected government. When asked about the

alternative to Girija Prasad, his opponents in parliament say evasively: "Well, anyone else from Nepali Congress." Can you get any more desperate than that? An opposition party running a mindless campaign for the express purpose of replacing one leader of the ruling party with another? Isn't that a problem for the ruling party: who it selects to head the government? Let the Nepali Congress sort out its own mess (and what a mess it is). The Lefts needn't paralyse the House, unless they are trying to bring it

prophets of doom, but that does not dismay me either. To keep crying wolf is a part of their calling, they are expected to show us which way *not* to go, raising a red flag when society does so. Public intellectuals are expected to preach Camus' neither/nor. Neither the socialism of the gallows, nor the capitalist order riddled with inequalities. Ivory towers are not places to start digging new roads, it's good enough that they are just watch-posts.

What we should really worry about is the apathy of the intelligentsia. Wealth according



Police pack litterateurs into trucks on 16 March, 1990.

down, and parliamentary democracy with it.

Despair is not the monopoly of the main opposition. Their comrades-in-arms are in hot pursuit of utopia with a "Peoples' War" which has consumed nearly 2,000 lives, spread misery and brought development to a standstill. It's like a suicide bomber, this terror. The sacrifice is there, but it is meaningless. To die for a pie in the sky is fanaticism born out of a sense of rejection. The Taliban blow up the Giant Buddhas in Bamiyan, Maoists burn a village in Saptari to punish it—both are acts of outrage caused by deep despair. The Prachanda Path may prove to be the knife that will cut the self-tightening noose around the neck of the Maoist movement, but only if the blade doesn't cut off its neck first. The Maoists are trying to offer an alternative, but it is a mirage of utopia that recedes the nearer we get to it.

The despair and recklessness of our political class (all erstwhile freedom fighters who offered us so much promise in 1990) is something we the people can force them to overcome. Politicians are experts at taking their cue from the political windsock, and if the mood of society changes from dejection to anticipation, leaders will once again come back to the fore to be what Napoleon called "dealers in hope".

Our intellectuals have turned into

to the gospel of Adam Smith is created primarily by capital. Marx said that it was labour that made and multiplied wealth. To those two factors of production, social democrats added the dimension of communication. It is communication that synthesises capital with labour, inspires innovation, and establishes harmony for the well being of the society.

Members of the intelligentsia perform that very crucial function of communication. They don't merely add, but multiply value. All of us have motives that makes us do what we do. For the ruling class, it is grandiose dreams of power. Fear fuels intellectuals, that is why they agonise so much. For the petty bourgeoisie, pretension—keeping up with the Koiralas. For the masses, the challenge of survival is so urgent that nothing else matters. But the motive that keeps intelligentsia 'productive' is hope. Snuff out hope, and it loses its light.

It is the death of hope that has immobilised the Nepali intelligentsia today. It must be resurrected if social democracy is to have a future. Where are you, all you doctors, engineers, artists and authors of the 1990 Kathmandu Spring? Where are you when the country needs you again? It is easy to curse politics and politicians, but show us the path of reform. Show us, and rekindle hope. ♦





SIKKIM CORONATION

# 25 years after SIKKIM

Next month, it will be 25 years since the Indian annexation of Sikkim. Sudheer Sharma looks back at how a Himalayan kingdom lost its sovereignty.

.....  
journalist Kuldeep Nayar in 1960: "Taking a small country like Sikkim by force would be like shooting a fly with a rifle." Ironically it was Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi who cited "national interest" to make Sikkim the 22nd state in the Indian union.

In the years leading up to the 1975 annexation, there was enough evidence that all was not well in relations between New Delhi and Gangtok. The seeds were sown as far back as 1947 after India gained independence, when the Sikkim State Congress started an anti-monarchist movement to introduce democracy, end feudalism and merge with India. "We went to Delhi to talk to Nehru about these demands," recalls CD Rai, a rebel leader. "He told us, we'll help you with democracy and getting rid of feudalism, but don't talk about merger now." Relenting to pressure from pro-democracy supporters, the 11th Chogyal was forced to include Rai in a five-member council of ministers, to sign a one-sided treaty with India which would effectively turn Sikkim into an Indian "protectorate", and allow the stationing of an Indian "political officer" in Gangtok.

As a leader of international stature with an anti-imperialist role on the world stage, Nehru did not want to be seen to be bullying small neighbours in his own backyard. But by 1964 Nehru had died and so had the 11th Chogyal, Sir Tashi Namgyal. There was a new breed of young and impatient political people emerging in Sikkim and things were in ferment. The plot thickened when Kaji Lendup

Dorji (also known as LD Kaji) of the Sikkim National Congress, who had an ancestral feud with the Chogyal's family, entered the fray. By 1973, New Delhi was openly supporting the Kaji's Sikkim National Congress. Pushed into a corner, the new Chogyal signed a tripartite agreement with political parties and India under which there was further erosion of his powers. LD Kaji's Sikkim National Congress won an overwhelming majority in the 1974 elections, and within a year the cabinet passed a bill asking for the Chogyal's removal. The house sought a referendum, during which the decision was endorsed. "That was a charade," says KC Pradhan, who was then minister of agriculture. "The voting was directed by the Indian military."

India's "Chief Executive" in Gangtok wrote: "Sikkim's merger was necessary for Indian national interest. And we worked to that end. Maybe if the Chogyal had been smarter, and played his cards better, it wouldn't have turned out the way it did."

It is also said that the real battle was not between the Chogyal and Kaji Lendup Dorji, but between their wives. On one side was Queen Hope Cook, the American wife of the Chogyal and on the other was the Belgian wife of the Kaji, Elisa-Maria Stanford. "This was a proxy war between the American and the Belgian," says former chief minister, BB Gurung. But there was a third woman involved: Indira Gandhi in New Delhi.

Chogyal Palden met the 24-year-old New Yorker, Hope Cook, in Darjeeling in 1963 and married

her. For Cook, this was a dream come true: to become the queen of an independent kingdom in Shangrila. She started taking the message of Sikkimese independence to the youth, and the allegations started flying thick and fast that she was a CIA agent. These were the coldest years of the Cold War, and there was a tendency in India to see a "foreign hand" behind everything so it was not unusual for the American queen to be labelled a CIA agent. However, as Hope Cook's relations with Delhi deteriorated, so did her marriage with the Chogyal. In 1973, she took her two children and went back to New York. She hasn't returned to Sikkim since.

Then there was Elisa-Maria, daughter of a Belgian father and German mother who left her Scottish husband in Burma and married LD Kaji in Delhi in 1957. The two couldn't have been more different. Elisa-Maria wanted to be Sikkim's First Lady, but Hope Cook stood in the way. "She didn't just want to be the wife of an Indian chief minister, she wanted to be the wife of the prime minister of an independent Sikkim." With that kind of an ambition, it was not surprising that with annexation, neither Hope Cook nor Elisa-Maria got what they wanted.

Meanwhile in New Delhi, Indira Gandhi was going from strength to strength, and India was flexing its muscles. The 1971 Bangladesh war and the atomic test in 1974 gave Delhi the confidence to take care of Sikkim once and for all. Indira Gandhi was concerned that Sikkim may show independent tendencies and become a UN member like Bhutan did in 1971, and she also didn't take kindly to the three Himalayan kingdoms, Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal, getting too cosy with each other. The Chogyal attended King Birendra's coronation in Kathmandu in 1975 and hobnobbed with the Pakistanis and the Chinese, and there was a lobby in Delhi that felt Sikkim may get Chinese help to become independent.

In his book on the Indian intelligence agency, *Inside RAW*, The story of India's secret service, Ashok Raina writes that New Delhi had taken the decision to annex Sikkim in 1971, and that



the RAW used the next two years to create the right conditions within Sikkim to make that happen. The key here was to use the predominantly-Hindu Sikkimese of Nepali origin who complained of discrimination from the Buddhist king and elite to rise up. "What we felt then was that the Chogyal was unjust to us," says CD Rai, editor of *Gangtok Times* and ex-minister. "We thought it may be better to be Indian than to be oppressed by the king."

So, when the Indian troops moved in there was general jubilation on the streets of Gangtok. It was in fact in faraway Kathmandu that there were reverberations. Beijing expressed grave concern. But in the absence of popular protests against the Indian move, there was only muted reaction at the United Nations in New York. It was only later that there were contrary opinions within India—Morarji



The Chogyal with Hope Cook at the palace in Gangtok in 1970 (left) and with King Mahendra. The Sikkim flag (top left).

Desai said in 1978 that the merger was a mistake. Even Sikkimese political leaders who fought for the merger said it was a blunder and worked to roll it back. But by then it was too late.

Today, most Sikkimese know they lost their independence in 1975, and Siliguri-bound passengers in Gangtok still say they are "going to India". The elite have benefited from New Delhi's largesse and aren't complaining. As ex-chief minister BB Gurung says: "We can't turn the clock back now." ♦

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

**Kaji Lendup Dorji (LD Kaji):** is 97, has left Sikkim and lives quietly in Kalimpong.



**KC Pradhan:** is involved with a pro-Chogyal political front.



**CD Rai:** ex-minister, now runs the *Gangtok Times*, an English weekly.



**Elisa-Maria Stanford:** died in Kalimpong in 1990.



**Hope Cook:** is a historian who does guided walking tours of Manhattan.



**Captain Sonam Yongda:** runs a school in a remote corner of Sikkim.



**The 13th Chogyal Wangchuk Namgyal:** lives in a monastery near Kathmandu.



**The 12th Chogyal:** lost his kingdom and died of cancer in 1982.



**Indira Gandhi:** was assassinated by her bodyguards in 1984.



**Crown Prince Tenzing Namgyal:** died in a mysterious car crash in 1978.



## LETTERS

RE-RESUNGA  
Since the publication of *Resunga: the Mountain of the Horned Sage*, we, the authors, have eagerly expected critical comments from Nepali readers. Unfortunately, neither Sudhindra Sharma's review (#29) nor Pratyoush Onta's letter (#32) addressed the subject matter of the book. Sharma expected that we, being French, should have mentioned French theoreticians like Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu. The value of these scholars is a separate issue—but we find they are more popular in ego-driven American or Americanised social science circles than in Europe, where they are simply taken as two of many possible theoreticians. The question really is what the relevance of these texts is to the data we published. General anthropological theory is important, and so is dealing

with the issue of representation, which is at the heart of anthropology, and not a new concern, as Sharma seems to suggest.  
But *Resunga* is not a theoretical essay, it is a collection of in-depth studies on the historical, ecological and social conditions of a Nepali region. Onta's criticism revolves around our alleged assertion that no research at the regional level was undertaken in Nepal before. No such statement appears in the book. Onta writes further that it is no surprise that foreigners are unaware of Nepali works, suggesting we don't care about them. We totally support Onta's effort to defend and promote Nepali writings, but the allegation here is not really grounded in fact. Readers may check for themselves: the book contains 73 references to Nepali work, of which 23 are in Nepali, in addition to the 70 historical documents from *Gulmi-Argha-Khanci*. It should be noted that

most of the Nepali texts we cited were written by local scholars and not by passers-by in the yatra tradition.

We would have been very interested to read Sharma's and Onta's opinion about the issues dealt with in the book, and their criticisms on the way we perceived, interpreted or presented what we saw in the field. From the ecological dynamics to the rituals and the political relations, the book's substance pertains to the life and perceptions of local people, not to the self-interrogation of the postmodern urban dweller. It is unfortunate that this was not read as something worth discussion.

Philippe Ramirez  
via email

WHY GOVERNMENT?  
In "Leaving it to the last minute" (Economic sense, #34). Artha Beed says the government lets valuable opportunities slip, and

only attempts to solve things at the eleventh hour. Looking at the situation with the Maoists and the sharing of water with India, it's clear the government was either unwilling or unable to negotiate while it had the chance. These issues require a lot of thought, expert opinion and time—and they are resolutely the government's responsibility.

As for hotel industry strikes, I'm not so sure they fall under the government's purview. This is an issue for hotel owners and their staff. Hotels are not under the control of the government, and that's wsshy the government only looks at them in terms of their contribution to national economic stability. Negotiations and finding the means to negotiate are the responsibility of hotel owners. The government is just one factor in the development of the industry. The government does lack negotiation skills and the art of timing. But does this mean the

government is unable to govern? Will negotiations led by the government solve the problem?

Ritu Raj Onta  
Nayabazar

HE WHO GIVES  
Why is it that whenever we hear of corruption, it is only about the receiving end? Those giving the *ghoos* get away scot free. No one talks about these national parasites who have cultivated and encouraged corruption among greedy officials. Such is the environment in our ministries, departments and institutions that even 'clean' people cannot remain spotless without being affected by the institutionalised corruption around them. *Ghoos*-taking and *ghoos*-giving should be taken as equal crime and the perpetrators punished equally.

Kiran Raj Joshi  
Bagh Bazar

SILENCE OF THE BEETLES  
First Kunda Dixit raves about the

gastronomic delights of such appetising delicacies as beetles, red ant abdomens and Boiled Eggs a la Murgh (Under my hat, #33). Then, he goes on to candidly confess his temptation to eat his spouse when he does not see any delectable bugs crawling around him. It seems that the infamous Dr. Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter of *Silence of the Lambs* has found a major disciple.

Yasoda Iwaram  
Lazimpat

CORRECTION:  
In *And the winner is: Nepali Music* (#34) the Lifetime Achievement Award to Nati Kaji Shrestha was presented by Chetan Karki. The architect of the Annual HITS FM Music Awards is Sonny Shrestha. —Ed.





HEMLATA RAI

The upcoming national census, officially called the Nepal Census on Population and Housing 2001, promises to bring women to the forefront of national statistics. And this number crunching will help planners adopt more specifically targeted policies to address women's needs in development projects and programmes. Development activists who work in gender-related areas hope that accurate statistics on women will also mean more realistic allocation of funds for their development and welfare.

From 10 to 21 June, 27,000 census employees, including 20,000 enumerators, will spread out through the country to find out more about the complex situations of individuals and families. Carrying out the census and processing the data will cost the government Rs 400 million.

Census 2001 is the first time Nepal's national survey will shed light on women's status and their contribution to the national economy through what development experts like to call "gender disaggregated data". Pakistan and India revised their most recent census questionnaires to accommodate data on women's economic

activities. Bangladesh's census this year focused on another area traditionally seen as gender-specific, birth control and infant mortality. What makes Nepal's census questionnaire unique compared with that of her neighbours' is that it includes questions that will hopefully provide answers about a woman's status within her family, in addition to her undocumented and generally uncounted economic activities.

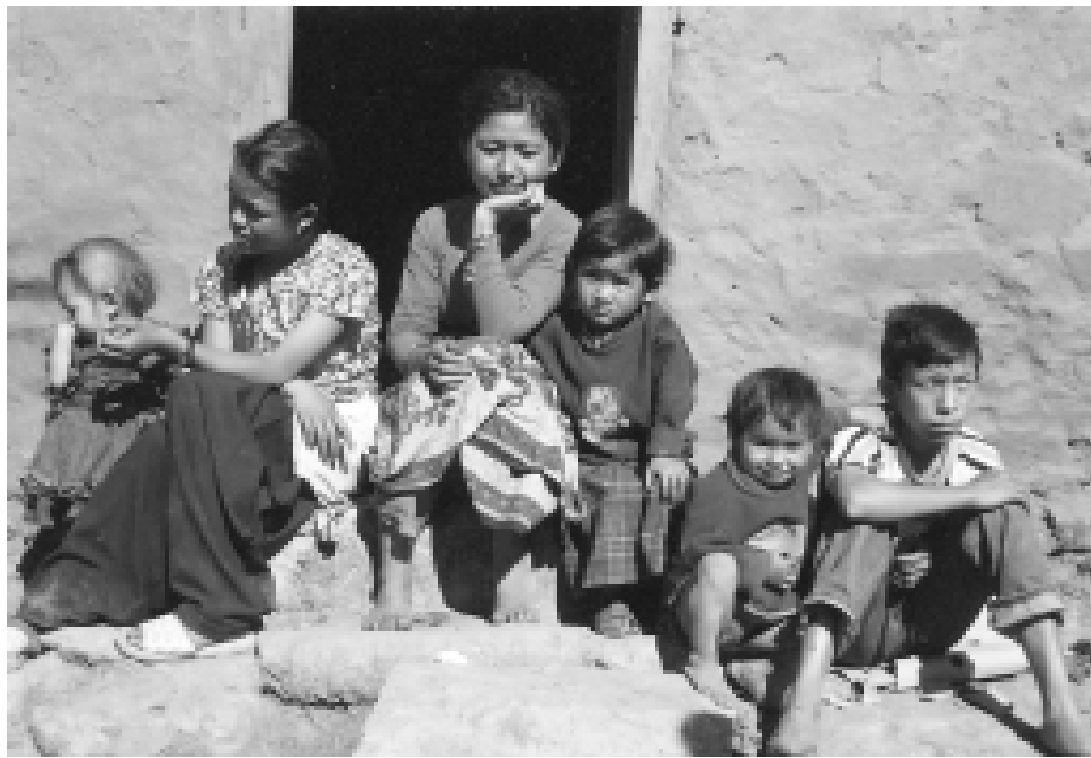
"The upcoming census is designed to reflect the condition and positioning of women within families," says Saru Joshi-Shrestha, a gender training specialist with the UNDP-funded Mainstreaming Gender Equity Programme. Questions related to marital status have also been revised and seen some additions. Much to the delight of anthropologists and social scientists, the revised questionnaire asks questions about polygamy and polyandry, separation, divorce and re-marriage, and people's age at their first marriage. This census will finally shed some light on anthropologists' claim that widow re-marriage is not stigmatised among some ethnic groups in Nepal. Questions like this will come in handy in order to understand the status of women within the household in different ethnic groups/communities in

# Women count

For the first time the national census will highlight women's status and their contribution to the national economy.

various geographic locations. All the earlier census did was ask the marital status of a person.

Despite the assertions of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) about the kind of conclusions the data will allow them to draw, and generous support from a consortium of donors, including various United Nations bodies, the real challenge in collecting gender-sensitive data lies in imparting the right kind of gender education and sensitisation to the enumerators. For instance, questions regarding women's access to and control over family property were finally dropped from the census questionnaire because during the pilot census held last year, the enumerators were confused about women's ownership rights and control over immovable property. The pilot census found that in the tarai district of Mahottari, land is normally registered in a woman's name, but they are not allowed to make crucial decisions over that land or other family property. Urban middle class women, on the other hand, seemed



made to the questionnaire is the collection of data about the cause of death. It is currently estimated that 539 of every 100,000 women die during childbirth. The

hopes to figure out the number of undiagnosed, unregistered AIDS deaths.

Donors and NGOs working for the empowerment of women will also now have a chance to review and redesign intervention strategies. The census will focus on assessing the achievements of informal education interventions in the empowerment of women. Unlike previous censuses, Census 2001 will also count "absent women"—previous censuses assumed that female family members do not migrate abroad. Empowerment agencies expect this question will help provide a sense of how many women have been trafficked, how many have willingly migrated for economic reasons either overseas or to other parts of Nepal, and how many have married across the border.

"Cultural differences and the literacy level of communities will

make a huge difference to the quality of the final data," says Radha Krishna GC, deputy director of CBS. The outcome of the pilot census provides ample proof. Of the four districts selected to pre-test the Census 2001 questionnaire, the enumerators found it difficult to develop a rapport with and obtain accurate information from respondents in the tarai district of Mahottari and the far-west district of Bajura compared to the eastern hill district of Dhankuta and Kathmandu. In Bajura and Mahottari, people were not enthusiastic about answering questions probing personal and family details.

Apart from these area-specific problems, there are other more general "Nepali" values that might prove to be obstacles in finding out more about the situation of women. People traditionally don't



to have more of a say in issues of family property even if it was registered in the name of a male family member.

Another important revision

census will help determine more accurately the maternal mortality rate, and also perhaps help in estimating how many deaths are due to unsafe abortions. The health sector also

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



# Grace under pressure

We need, in Kathmandu, to look closely at how cities succeed against the odds, while we rot on the vine.

CAPE TOWN: Alas, I had just a day to explore this sublime city with perhaps the world's finest setting. Time enough to be enchanted and inspired. Against the awesome backdrop of Table Mountain, Cape Town spills towards two oceans across the neck of a narrow peninsula. The buildings are a divine mix of old colonial and assertive modern. The streets seethe with a multicultural melting pot. Did you know, for example, that the Cape's Muslims have been here for four hundred years—longer than its black African inhabitants. The old Dutch stock has been here even longer. More recent arrivals are from south and southeast Asia, Madagascar, England and America.

Of course, the social tensions are many and powerful. Apartheid's ugly stain spreads well past its official termination after Nelson Mandela took charge. The crime rate is shocking. Whites blame blacks, blacks blame the system, and the mixed race "coloureds" are caught in between. But strangely enough, none of that takes away from Cape Town's eternal allure. It's in the food, the nightlife, the rejuvenated waterfront and inner city. Whatever the roaring fires of racial division and violence, Capetonians just want to have fun. And that brings me to my point. We need, in Kathmandu, to look closely at how cities succeed against the odds. More than that, we need to form alliances and find out how others progress while we rot on the vine. They face similar problems, usually on a much grander scale. Cities are the greatest achievement of human civilisation, where culture acquires meaning through interaction with others. Yet growth and success come at a price.

That much is obvious from history. The first known city of the



modern era, *Ur*, between the Tigris and Euphrates in ancient Sumeria, collapsed and died under the sheer weight of its population, buried in rubbish, parched and polluted. That was over 2,000 years ago. The plains of history are littered with the corpses of other such failed city-states. Have we learnt so little in that time? If so, we have only our sorry selves to blame.

So back to Kathmandu and Cape Town. We have, as the capital of this Himalayan kingdom, a collection of urban treasures too precious to waste: the architectural wonders of the Newari houses, the temples, the street life, the lush hinterland, the Himalayan rampart. Understand that I refer to all of the Valley's great cities and towns here, not just to

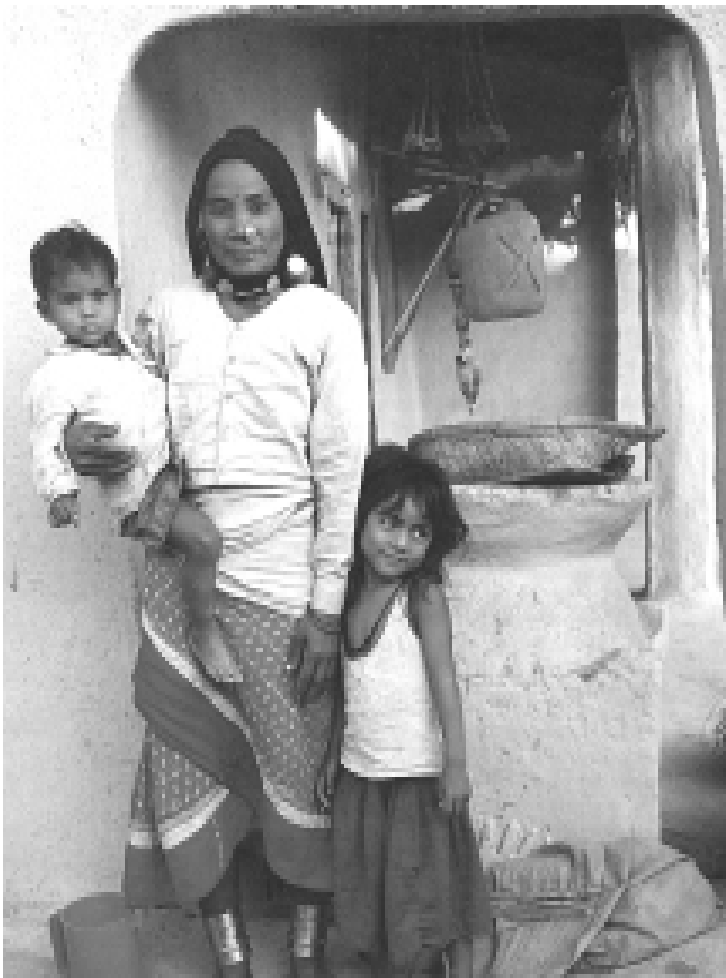
the Kathmandu municipal area. That's a boundary drawn by a bureaucrat. Mine is etched on my heart. Why, oh why, do we tolerate decline, dirt, poisonous air and water, constant noise, and the slow death of aesthetic sense in a clutter of garish filth masquerading as commerce. Surely, if Cape Town thrives despite social tensions and harshly divisive economics, if Mexico City can cope with a population more than ten times that of our Valley, then Kathmandu can reverse its decline. And I don't mention Rio De Janeiro's great poverty, Toronto's fiercely anti-social climate, Sydney's remoteness. Then there's New York, once a competitor for murder capital of the world, now barely a presence in the league table of urban violence thanks to controversial but effective urban policing and the creation of community spirit where once there was only cynicism and gloom.

I deliberately include in my thesis examples from poorer countries to stifle the defeatist cries of "we can't afford it" or "we need foreign help" because frankly, people, that's rubbish worse than you find on the streets. Kathmandu, Greater Kathmandu if you like, can do it. It takes some things in short supply in the Valley at the moment: optimism, hard work, spirit, commitment. Forget Lauda Air, hotel strikes and pessimism in general. Let's make Kathmandu into Cape Town without leaving the Valley. The other choice is to rename it *Ur* and surrender to the incoming tides of history. ♦



recognise a woman as the head of a household. Even educated urban women, for instance, may not be comfortable naming a female member as the head of the family even if the token male head has been absent for a long time. The 1991 census reported only 13 percent women-headed households, which seems implausible given the male migration trend for employment. The Nepal Labour Force Survey 1998/1999 shows that almost one million people, approximately three quarters of them male, migrated from far-western Nepal to India in search of jobs.

The other major focus of this census, then, is women's participation in the economy. For the first time, Census 2001 will recognise household sector activities, such as primary and secondary processing of goods, as economic activities in line with the UN System of National Accounting (SNA) 1993 and the recent International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of "work". SNA 1993 greatly widened the definition of "production" to secondary processing like tailoring and making mats for household use, and activities like fodder- and firewood-collection, fetching water, and food processing—all these are now economic activities. This shift in the definition of work has major implications in calculating women's economic contribution. But Census 2001 isn't as radical as it seems. Unlike this year's Indian census, domestic activities like cooking for the family and looking after children and the elderly—women's contribution



to the social sector—will remain unaccounted for. To ensure that women's social and economic realities are questioned from a female perspective, the CBS wants at least 20 percent of the enumerators in all districts to be female. Teachers are one of the main groups mobilised as enumerators, and as all primary schools are required by law to have at least one female teacher, it shouldn't be too hard to maintain this percentage. But people like Meena Acharya, an economist crusading for gender disaggregated data since the 1970s, does not find much to celebrate.

"Recruiting 20 percent female enumerators does not help much. We should focus on increasing the number of women at the supervisor or area supervisor levels, if not at the level of district census officer," she said. Her concerns will not be addressed for some time—of the 90 district census officers appointed so far, only five are women. Apart from its focus on creating gender disaggregated data, the Census 2001 will also ask questions about ethnicity, the situation of disabled people, child labourers and children at risk. ♦

Essential services

One more sector has been declared an essential service. Strikes are now illegal in hotels, resorts and other tourism-related businesses. In 1999, the cabin crew of Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation went on strike demanding that they be allowed to fly leased aircraft, and that the national flag carrier should purchase aircraft rather than obtain them on long-term lease. The government resorted to the antiquated piece of legislation to force the employees back to work. The 43-year-old law came in handy again recently—to ban strikes in hotels on 15 March, after hotel workers, demanding a 10 percent service charge, decided to stop work. Again on 17 March, the government included the transport sector under the same law. That was after employees of the Nepal Transport Corporation decided to halt trolley bus services pressing for the reversal of a recent government restructuring (and downsizing) decision. The number of services declared "essential" so far has reached ten. Communication services, including the postal service, airports and related services, print media and the government press, arms and military related sectors, telecommunications, including telex and telephone services, and electricity and drinking water distribution are now to be strike-free.



Keeping peace

Keeping peace was a main point on the agenda Nepali officials discussed with the United Nations during Kofi Annan's 12-13 March visit to Kathmandu. Perhaps, as an outcome, the Royal Nepal Army is to deploy 900 soldiers for UN peacekeeping duty in troubled Sierra Leone in June. They will partly replace the 4,000 Indian and Jordanian peacekeepers there now. This will be the first time Nepali soldiers will be deployed in Africa. At present 800 Nepalis are serving in Lebanon and 200 in East Timor. Since its first peacekeeping assignment under the UN in 1958, over 36,000 Nepali have served under the UN's command. Defence Ministry officials say the soldiers are expected to earn Rs 150 million in their six months in Sierra Leone. Nepali UN peacekeepers in Lebanon and East Timor currently bring in about the same amount.

Food aid

Germany says it is giving \$1.08 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) for use in Phase II of the Rural Community Infrastructure Works (RCIW) programme. The RCIW, now operational in 35 districts, combines food aid with community development projects that the locals participate in building. The RCIW was launched in 10 districts in 1996. The project purchased rice worth \$113 million in the five years of Phase I for distribution to 250,000 food-deficient families working on irrigation, fishery, flood control and soil conservation projects. The RCIW is a joint initiative of the government of Nepal and Germany and the World Food Programme. The WFP says the activities supported with food aid have helped increase local production and also connect many rural areas to markets. The RCIW now plans to move into the far-western hills and support communities in rural road-building and other activities to increase food security—mainly by helping increase local production.

Long way to go

Forty-one years after the first shovel hit the ground, another 22 km section (4.75m wide) of the Banepa-Bardibas road has been completed. The 158-km stretch to link Banepa, east of Kathmandu, and Bardibas on the East-West Highway in the tarai to the south-east, has been on and off the drawing boards for the past four decades. The Banepa to Bakundebesī section was opened to traffic last week. The project has been a priority of the Nepali Congress because BP Koirala initiated its construction. But it was no longer a priority after the royal coup of 1960. It was back on track again after the Nepali Congress came back to power after 1990. The road is to be built in four phases. The first 37 km section linking Sindhuli Bazar and Bardibas was opened to traffic in 1997. A track has been completed to link the 39 km stretch from Sindhuli Bazar to Khurkot, as has a 32-km stretch to link Khurkot and Nepalthok. The Banepa-Bardibas road is expected to be completed by 2003. The road will help open the hinterland of Sindhuli, Ramechhap and Kavrepalanchok districts and also ease traffic on the Prithvi Highway. Upon completion, Bardibas will be just 170 km from Kathmandu. The distance from Kathmandu to Bardibas on the East-West Highway is now 350 km. Japan provided Rs 5.88 billion for the construction of two sections of the road, while the government chipped in Rs 185 million for land acquisition and administrative costs, and Rs 10 million for maintenance.

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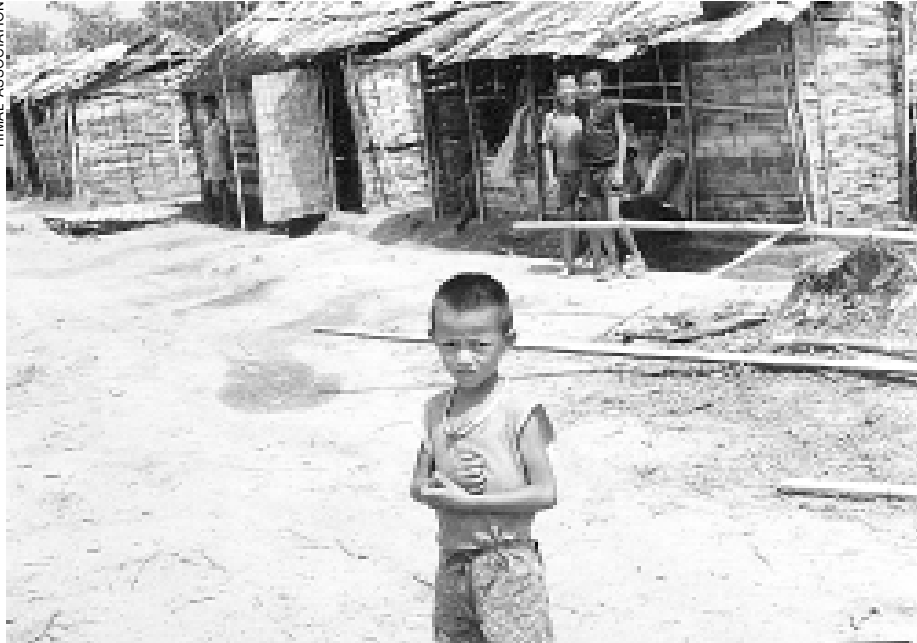
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# "Even if we go



Æ from p1

"This is a huge undertaking," admits an undaunted Usha Nepal. "Also, this is the first time both teams have been involved in something like this. Once we start, we'll see what kind of problems come up and try to solve them," she says. While both sides have agreed to conduct the refugee identification and verification process on a bilateral basis, on Bhutan's insistence, the role of a third party or mediator hasn't been totally ruled out.

"Somewhere in the margins, we've kept that option open, but no one's been identified, yet," an official said.

Bhutanese refugee rights groups are keen to include the United Nations High Commission for Refugees

(UNHCR) as a third party to ensure a fair identification process, and the refugees themselves are looking to the Bhutan Refugees Representative Repatriation Committee (BRRRC) as their champion. This two-year-old Jhapa-based committee, elected by refugees in the camps, is trying hard to maintain its apolitical image, and keeping above the fray of the fractious refugee organisations.

Like the Bhutan and Nepal teams, BRRRC is keeping a low profile. "We don't want to jeopardise the verification process," says a BRRRC member in Jhapa. Refugees we interviewed had pinned their hopes on the committee. Said one 30-something Bhutanese: "When it comes to the crunch, I'm

counting on BRRRC to help me." Like many others, he was forced to sign papers that they were migrating to Nepal voluntarily, and this could complicate the verification process. When he was home minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba agreed in 1993 with his Bhutanese counterpart Dago Tsering to a controversial categorisation process. Deuba agreed to four categories of refugees:

- forcefully evicted bonafide Bhutanese
  - Bhutanese who emigrated voluntarily
  - non-Bhutanese
  - Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts
- Indrawati Rai, secretary of the Refugee Women's Forum in Beldangi I, is also concerned

about how the categorisation process will affect orphans, dependants and other adults without families. "Many of them don't have papers, who is going to speak on their behalf?" asks the once-shy housewife who is now a firebrand activist in the camps.

But by far the most sensitive issue is the one of resettlement of northerners in the southern parts of Bhutan from where the refugees were evicted. Refugee families have heard reports filtering out of Bhutan that their homes and farms are now occupied by thousands of farmers resettled by the government. "I have heard that my home in Chirang Basti has been taken over," one refugee, who did not want to be named, told us. "Even if we go back, where will we

live?"

One Nepali verification team member preferred anonymity admitted to us that there is vagueness in the definition of dependants and orphans. The member is convinced some of these issues can only be resolved through third-party mediation. Says a refugee activist, "These points have been raised with UNHCR and the Nepali government's Refugee Coordination Unit. But as long as there's proof, we'll try to force the issue."

Under the present circumstances the Nepali team would have the role of a bystander. "We're basically present to see



This page: From a village in Bhutan, to Beldangi I in Nepal, and the Joint Verification Team office in Damak where Bhutanese members have just arrived.

Facing page: Lining up for water, Chandra Subedi (left) at the Children's Programme Office, and Lachhi Maya (right) in her shop.

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS



Women in Achham toiling at the tap.

To most readers of Kathmandu's daily newspapers Achham is just one more name on the list of places in Nepal which are experiencing the growing horrors of a "People's War". It was there last month that a bomb meant for the police post and jail ended up killing two children near a water tap. Two more deaths, and

several more wounded. This incident made headlines, but the committed efforts of people trying to improve the lives of people in places like Achham never make it to the press.

A medical team organised by the German organisation, GTZ, recently set up a 10-day medical clinic at a hospital near where the

## A tale of two wars

The whole country should join in a "people's war" against poverty and discrimination, and especially against the kind of cruelty to women and dalits still rampant in Western Nepal.

two children were killed in the explosion. The team of six doctors included four gynaecologists, and was there to treat the never-treated and the mis-treated women of this remote and neglected area of western Nepal. The clinic at the 15-bed Mangalsen District Hospital was a resounding success, but no one reported it. The doctors included the indomitable Aruna Upreti, and attracted long queues of women who had never before had a medical checkup, some from as far as three days' walk away. Many were relieved to see the doctors were all women. These doctors came to wage war against disease, poverty, discrimination and the age-old neglect of remote areas of western Nepal by a long succession of uncaring governments in Kathmandu.

In 10 days, the doctors examined 1,700 women as part of a reproductive health project carried out in conjunction with the government health services and the Achham district authorities. The most shocking condition treated in Mangalsen, and which doctors are still discussing with incredulity, were the 200 cases of "prolapsed

uterus". This is a condition in which the uterus, often weakened at childbirth and the lack of rest soon after, falls outside the body hanging infected between the woman's legs affecting her movement, her ability to work, and her marital life.

Photographs of these coconut-sized red, rubbed and infected appendages reminded me of the horrors of Indian railway stations, and the sight in 1960 of a desperately poor woman sleeping near the tracks with that huge infected uterus hanging out for passersby to see. The image haunted me for years. At that time, young and just arrived in Asia, I had no idea of the condition from which the women were suffering: horror and ignorance often overwhelms compassion. I am ashamed to admit that was the case then.

Forty years later, I now know what I had seen, and I know that a prolapsed uterus is one of the most tragic manifestations of poverty and abuse of women in this part of the world. The mistreatment of women in western Nepal is legendary: in many villages women have to spend four to seven days during their menstrual

period in a tiny enclosed, airless building known as a *chaupadi goth* because they are considered unclean during those times. They also give birth in the same stifling surroundings, and often have to return to heavy manual work immediately afterwards.

One woman told doctors she had been ordered to move a heavy container of grain by her mother-in-law, and the strain caused something to drop from inside her lower abdomen. Another woman was forced back to work in the fields a day after giving birth, while her husband played *courvie* with cronies: she vividly remembers the sensation of her falling uterus. Her husband was appalled by her deformity, so her suffering was two-fold. Many husbands immediately take another wife.

At the Mangalsen clinic, 113 women with prolapsed uteruses were referred to Nepalgunj for surgery. The uteruses of the other 88 were coaxed back into place and held there with a plastic ring. Other cases were more familiar, and more easily treated like sexually transmitted diseases. The clinic at Achham was so successful, and the women

benefited so much, that a similar medical clinic is being held in Doti this week.

And so the two wars continue: The "People's War" has directed attention to the government's neglect of, and discrimination against, the citizens of poor remote areas of Nepal, but it is increasingly taking a toll among those same poor it is supposed to be helping. Then there is the mostly still foreign-funded war against poverty, and here health clinics like the ones carried out by GTZ are proving to be surprisingly effective.

A lot of recent inflow of aid dollars into Nepal from organisations like DFID and the ADB are intended to "alleviate" Nepal's poverty so that people do not fall into the arms of the Maoists. But most donors fail to realise that the corrupt government that they so lavishly prop with aid are the very reason the Maoists have been so successful.

And whether we like it or not, we have to admit that the Maoists' "war" has woken up this slumbering nation and donors about festering social ills and inequities like nothing before. The whole country should join in a "people's war" against poverty and discrimination, and especially against the kind of cruelty to women and dalits still rampant in western Nepal. ♦



# back, what's really wrong? Wi



that the interviews are conducted fairly, that the interviewees do not feel intimidated or threatened at any point, or misunderstand questions on the form. In the end, the authenticity of documents may have to be vouched for by the Bhutanese side," says a Nepali member.

Both sides have now agreed that citizenship papers and other documents would not be the only basis for verification—many refugees had to leave in a hurry and many have simply never brought them along. They will make decisions based on extensive interviews and the gathering of supplementary evidence. Foreign Ministry officials in Kathmandu told us that verification was in fact a Bhutanese idea because their position has always been that all the people in the camps are not Bhutanese. What it will do is determine once and for all how many Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese are in the camps. The verification could take a long time, but Nepal is interested in getting it over with and move to the next step: the four categories.

Bhutan is reported to have committed itself to taking back everyone except category 2: those who left "voluntarily". But it is not as straightforward as that because the criteria for categorisation are subjective, and many thousands of genuine

refugees could fall through the net. Nepal had, in the past, been talking about a "harmonisation" of the categories. But at present no one wants to talk too much about categorisation because that was the biggest stumbling block in the past years of fruitless negotiations. International pressure and Bhutan's own problems with Bodo and ULFA rebels in Assam seem to have softened Bhutan's stance since December, and even if Thimpu brought up categorisation again, it may not be as rigid.

Says a senior Nepali official in Kathmandu: "We have seen time and time again that the main Bhutanese tactic is buying time, lingering, allowing things to drag on in the hope that the refugees will assimilate into Nepali society. That hasn't happened, and they must have realised that they have to get this over with. But verification is a test the refugees will have to go through, it is the beginning of a solution. They're good at springing surprises though."

But also to blame has been Nepal's own lack of a clear strategy in dealing with the refugee issue—a fact compounded by political

instability in Kathmandu over the last ten years. It did not help either that India has deliberately kept aloof, although it abetted in the transfer of refugees from Bhutan to Nepal.

Despite the continued uncertainty about their status, and the long wait ahead, refugees like 26-year-old Chandra Subedi cling to the sliver of hope that has emerged after December: "I regret I wasn't able to keep up with the Dzongkha language which means I have little chance of joining the Bhutanese civil service. But once I'm home, I'm sure I'll find work." Chandra was a student when he left Bhutan, now he is a father of two. Today, he supervises the Children's Programme Forum in Beldangi I and is working towards a college degree via correspondence course.

But even young Chandra has no illusions about the government of his country. He wishes the verification team could hurry things up and handle 50 families a day. Says Chandra, and with a faraway look on his face and a hint of hope in his voice, he adds: "But maybe this time we can finally go back home." ♦

## FEEDBACK

There are Nepalis who campaign for change at considerable personal cost and show real leadership potential. So why do they make so little impact?

CK Lal's column "Corruption, Nepalis and the Expat" (#32) in response to your interview with the US Ambassador was, as ever, thought-provoking and made some good points. Yet, at least as much as Frank's remarks, it failed to get to the heart of Nepal's development problems, or acknowledge the sincerity and deeply-felt frustration of most foreigners and Nepalis who work in development. Nepal faces several severe disadvantages beyond its control in trying to move forward. Here and there at grassroots level, where technology has been appropriate, local people have had 'ownership' from the outset and leadership has been strong but consensual, noteworthy successes have been scored at very low cost. However, these are hardly ever duplicable on a larger scale. Why?

Is corruption at the root of the problem or is it merely symptomatic? Nepal carries the dead weight of those in positions of power at all levels of society who cannot see beyond their own narrow interests and have no thought for their own community let alone the country as a whole. But Nepal also has men and women of vision, integrity and dedication who campaign for change at considerable personal cost and show real leadership potential. So why do they make so little impact? Are Nepalis simply better at talking than actually doing? Or is it because so often good people work alone, or in small, narrow groups not even united with others who advocate the same causes? Could the answer have anything to do with the experience of foreigners who arrive believing in a society of supreme tolerance, but as they stay longer become

increasingly aware that Nepalis don't talk to each other, and that society is here, in fact, deeply divided, fragmented, and hierarchy ridden.

Can the most civilised, educated, fair-minded Nepalis, who have no difficulty in working with 'neutral' outsiders, really not forge bonds of trust to work for a common cause with fellow-citizens of different ethnic background, caste, education and interest group? Will the day never come when a majority of Nepalis of all ethnic groups and religious persuasions are united behind a government that acts and speaks for them all, and so assists them in developing their country themselves in appropriate ways. Then, far from allowing foreign consultants to soak up funds meant for Nepal, government could say to the donors, "We Nepalis have our own vision of what our country can and will be, and it doesn't match the development model fashionable at the moment, so if you want to help us it will be on our terms and only where we feel we want help."

Nepal is a wonderful country with incalculable riches in her geography, her magnificent cultural heritage, and the warmth, dignity and spirituality of her diverse peoples in their brave struggle for survival. But she cannot attain her potential and proper place in the world, or give the world the many gifts of wisdom she has to offer unless her more privileged sons and daughters take the lead in listening to, identifying with and trusting other Nepalis, accepting them as having an equal stake in her future, and working together with them for her advancement.

"A Foreigner"  
by email

## Culinary fire hazards

25 years of burning my tongue at home and abroad allows me to talk with authority on chillies.

Thanks to Sujata Tuladhar for making my mouth salivate like melting glaciers with the mere mention of Honacha's aalu (*Kathmandu's red hot melting pot*, #33). I could imagine my nostrils flaring up, my heartbeat accelerating, my ears all red, and my tongue on fire, even though I was thousands of miles away from Patan Durbar Square. I wish I was at Honacha's right now.

Having had the experience of burning my tongue with chilli peppers at home and abroad over a span of 25 years, I thought it would be appropriate for me to add some of the things that I know about chillies. First of all, *jeeray* is called *jeeray* not because it originated in Jiri, but because it is as small as a *jeerua* (cumin seed) and as potent as well. A *jeeray* is a fire hazard, and the kind of chilli for which you need a fire extinguisher handy in the loo the morning after. The bird chilli, which Ms Tuladhar calls the bird's-eye chilli, is a little bit bigger (fatter, and longer) than a *jeeray*. This chilli gets its name because birds eat it and the seeds come out intact in bird-droppings. That is why bird chillies grow in the wild.

Compared to *jeeray*, Thai chillies are much hotter. They are more slender and shorter, like their fellow countrymen, than our common khursani, but have far more fire-power than your garden varieties of chillies. *Jeeray* are hot, but not as much as the *dulley* and the *akabara* of eastern Nepal. Ask anyone from Bhojpur, Panchthar, and Ilam about *akabara* and *dulley* and you will hear sob stories—stories of runny noses, sniffing, and snivelling. *Akabara*, as the name suggests, is named after the emperor Akbar, and is the

emperor of all chillies. And if the *akabara* has the majesty and power of Akbar, the *dulley* is a VC-winning WWI Johnny Gurkha, short, round, fast and lethal.

The *gyanmaara*, although it looks like an *akabara*, is in fact quite mild. It takes something to be an *akabara*. It is mostly confined to the Valley and its periphery and is considered—falsely—by the Valley community to be the hottest chilli on the planet. American chilli lovers boast that the habañero—the neutron bomb from the Caribbean—is the hottest in the world, as it measures 400,000 Scoville units—on the scientific scale used to measure the hotness of chilli peppers. Bird chillies go up to 150,000, and our garden variety (*baariko khursani*) measure between 40-80,000 Scoville units.

Habañeros also have a wonderful flavour, unlike our *dulleys* and *akabarays*. I have looked around, but it looks like as yet nobody has measured the hotness of our *dulleys* and *akabarays*. I can vouch that *dulley* and *akabara* dais from the Nepali Hills are far hotter and raunchier than the Caribbean coastal señors. What the Americans do not know is that we, in Nepal, might have the most lethal weapon in the spice

world. Since our athletes always come last in international sporting events, and we have nothing to boast of other than the mountains and the temples, we might as well start internationalising the issue. A day will come when the international community, especially the Americans, will have to recognise Nepal as a condiment superpower. *Dulleys* and *akabarays* will join Mt Everest and Lumbini in adding lustre and fame to Nepal in the years to come.

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BIZ NEWS

Quality steel

The Panchakanya Steel Limited, Kotehawa, Bhairahawa has been awarded the ISO 9001:2000 for its cold-twisted, ribbed (CRT) deformed steel bars. Panchakanya is Nepal's largest manufacturer of steel rods and produces about 35,000 metric tons each year. The group's steel now has about 20 percent of the market share, and the bars are also exported to Tibet. "We plan to expand exports to neighbouring Indian cities also," says Pradip Kumar Shrestha, managing director of Panchakanya Steel. Nepal's domestic demand for steel is about 160,000 metric tons and has generally grown by about 10 percent every year. Business has gone a little slack in the last two years, due largely to the slowdown in large infrastructure development and the slump in real estate. Shrestha says that roughly 70 percent of steel industries have shut down and Panchakanya is one of the few that added capacity to achieve economy of scale. All the market really needs to pick up speed again are a few development projects using local product. Most foreign-funded infrastructure projects still import steel for construction, which Shrestha hopes will now change because quality steel is available locally. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) certification is approved by Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance. Panchakanya's steel was the first company to receive the Nepal Standard Quality Award in the industry, and also the first to receive ISO certification.

Airport tax hike

Here's something for air travellers. The government has approved a proposal from the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) to raise the airport tax at departure. Passengers departing from the Tribhuvan International Airport for a destination in South Asia have to pay Rs 700. For all other destinations the departure tax is Rs 1,000. The tax for foreigners on domestic routes is Rs 500 and Rs 700. The new tax for Nepalis flying within the country is Rs 150, Rs 125 and Rs 50, depending on what category the destination's airstrip falls into. CAAN has also raised the fees airline companies pay for the use of airport facilities and the rates applicable for renting office space at airports.

Himalayan Bank profits

The Himalayan Bank Limited, a Nepal-Pakistan joint venture, has announced that profits in fiscal 1999/2000 were up 20 percent compared to the previous year's take. Profits reached Rs 199.3 million, up from Rs 165.2 million in fiscal 1998/99. The bank has also announced an interim dividend to shareholders, to be reconciled with the profits expected in the current fiscal year. The bank's deposits in the first six months of this fiscal year reached Rs 19.1 billion and investments, Rs 9.7 billion. The Himalayan Bank, which began operations in January 1993, now has nine branches and one contact office. It also plans to venture into development banking.

Anti-smuggling patrol

Royal Nepal Army units have begun patrolling two customs check points along Nepal's borders with India and China. The troops are already doing the rounds at the border with India at Birgunj, and that with Tibet at Tatopani. The government's plan is to mobilise patrol troops at four more customs points and the surrounding areas.

Nepal business expo

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) is organising a trade fair 10-14 April together with the Tradex 2001, an annual affair of FNCCI's partner for the event, Everest Exhibitions P Ltd. The Nepal Business Expo 2001 is expected to showcase products through 350 outlets. The organisers say the fair will likely be an annual affair.



पञ्चकन्या

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED



Essential acts

The amendments to the Essential Services Act should have been an action of first, not last resort.

The government attempted to defuse the potentially disastrous situation arising from the service charge dispute between hotel owners and hotel workers by bringing the industry under the Essential Services Act. The action has restored normalcy—for the time being, for who knows how long—to the industry, but is that the only outcome we'll see?

What people want to know is that if the government could prohibit strikes in the hotel industry, why did it not act earlier? Why wait for the strike to cripple hotel operations and tarnish the already waning image of tourism in Nepal? This should have been an action of first, not last resort. Bear in mind, though, that this is simply a short-term measure. If this issue is to be resolved with any certainty or finality, the government must force the industry and labour to talk. One way to bring both sides to the negotiating table would've been making not just strikes illegal, but also the closure of hotels by the enterprises. Applying the Essential Services Act to the health sector has made little difference to the situation there—health workers are still protesting through strikes. Hotel workers behaved like law-abiding citizens, and withdrew their call to strike, but that hasn't ended anything.



The government's action turned this Beed's thoughts to the Act itself. The Act was promulgated in 1957, and needless to say, remains there to this day. It has outlived its initial impetus and rationale. It underwent no changes during Panchayat rule or after the restoration of democracy. The Act is basically this two-page document that just lists essential services, says that strikes in these

sectors are not allowed by law, and ends with a mild reminder that if strikes were to take place, they would be treated as criminal offences. The penalty? An absurdly small

sum of money, and even so, it's quite difficult to actually find cases where people have been prosecuted under the provisions of the Act.

As most of our crises seem to do, the hotel industry crisis has forced the government to turn its attention to yet another aspect of governance. It's time the Essential Services Act was reviewed and brought up to date to cover not only services that are essential to citizens, but also economic services essential to the nation. If, for instance, we have IT companies doing well, and we feel that IT could be the backbone of tomorrow's exports, then we need to put in place legislature dealing

with this sector, too. And we need to do it before the fact, rather than wait to be pushed into a corner.

Essential Services could range from highways that are constantly shut down, to neighbourhood lanes which are regularly blocked by rampant digging. Education and health are, of course, essential services, and if someone decides to close schools or threaten to close schools there have to be mechanisms in place to make sure they're unsuccessful. Protecting essential services means the government ensures citizens have access to them. If the highway is blocked for hours and if the local administration is ineffective, then perhaps there could be a provision to ensure that the army can be brought in to clear the highway.

Like every other legislation, the Essential Services Act needs to be amended to reflect today's Nepal and the problems we face. The spirit of the constitution must, of course, be upheld, and people's fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution, but there have to be provisions that allow state intervention when lawlessness threatens to take over. There should be spirited debate about specific cases and the legal aspects of such provisions. At least this will mean the issue is on the radar of our lawmakers and the judiciary—this is a basic move to ensure that Nepal and the Nepali economy survive. ♦

Readers can post their views at [arthabeed@yahoo.com](mailto:arthabeed@yahoo.com)

VIEWPOINT

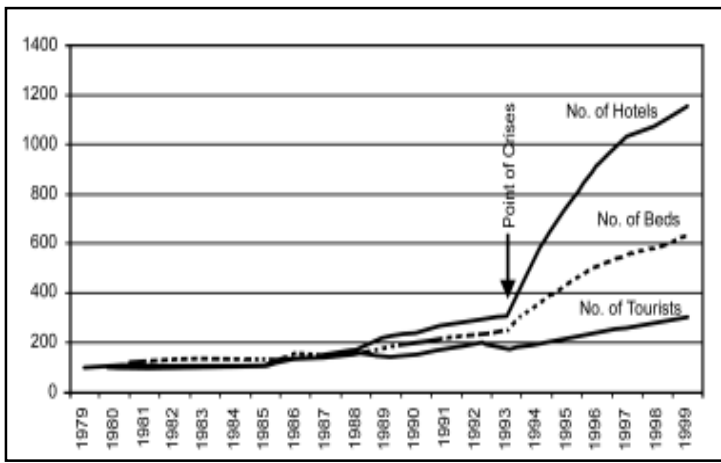
by NARAYAN MANANDHAR



Tips of icebergs

Whoever invented the system of tipping (a voluntary gift given by the customer, graded on satisfaction provided) would have found it hard to imagine that it would freeze the entire range of labour-management relations in Nepal's hotel industry, and threaten the nation's economy.

The demand is not new, but it went into high gear when the two hotel unions affiliated with GEFONT (General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions) and NTUC (Nepal Trade Union Congress) united in August 2000 to push for their one and only demand: the introduction of a ten percent service charge in tourist rated hotels and restaurants in Nepal. They were threatening the tourism industry at a time when it would hurt the most—the peak tourist season in the autumn of 2000. The managements, which never imagined matters would come to a head, was in for a rude shock. The first deadline was 19 November, 2000. Hotel owners and the government bought time by having the threatened strike postponed. A month later, on 11 December when the unions refused to back down, hotel managements took the unprecedented step of throwing



Here's one way out of the hotel impasse: scrap the present two percent tourist service fee and replace it by ten percent to be shared by government, hotel management and the unions.

out their own guests.

Again, the unions agreed to put off action for another two months allowing the Legal Committee headed by the National Planning Commission vice-chairman Prithivi Raj Lital to carry out the necessary study. But a distracted government and the distrustful attitude of the two sides meant no headway was made in negotiations until the new deadline for

strike action, 15 March, loomed. The hotel owners sought to avoid the strike by going to the Appellate Court but the Court's verdict was against them. The consequence: the hotels closed, senior management waited on tables and cleaned rooms for one day until the government enforced the Essential Services Act (ESA) and effectively declared the strike illegal. The unions went back to work,

vowing to challenge the government decision in court.

The government has classified four sectors of the economy to be most prone to labour disputes: garments, carpets, transport and hotels. While the carpet industry is gradually recovering from knocks by the international publicity over child workers in the early nineties, the garment industry is nervously waiting for 2005 when the multi-fibre agreement will lapse. It's best not to comment on the public transport sector, which is careening from one crisis to another to do with fares and emissions.

That leaves us with the hotel industry, the lifeblood of the economy, bringing in \$70 million every year, and given the uniqueness of Nepal's tourism product, has the potential to do much better. Long before the service charge dispute hit the headlines, a large number of court cases were piling up at the Labour Court. In fact, the hotel industry is second only to textiles in the number of labour-related cases registered. There are several reasons for this: being a service industry, hotels are labour-intensive, the workforce is relatively more literate and has the greater bargaining power that comes from being unionised.

Labour disputes tend to erupt in sectors going through a crisis. In

Nepal, we saw the telltale signs of a problem brewing when the number of hotels and hotel-beds after 1993 showed a sharp spurt in anticipation of a tourism boom that never materialised (see graph). As competition heated, undercutting led to a fall in revenue, trapping hotel owners in a vicious spiral. Worker frustration rose. The management in Nepal has never been able to see the "positive power" of unions, and fears their power to say "no". This has led to an adversarial relationship between management and unions not just in the hotel industry but in the country as a whole.

By passing the buck of the service charge issue to the government (which had already proved its inaction and inefficiency) the management has now transformed an enterprise-level problem into a national crisis. And the government, by imposing the ESA, has instigated the unions to file a case with the International Labour Organisation citing violation of Convention 98, which guarantees their rights to organise and bargain collectively. In 1996, Nepal signed Convention 98, one of the ILO's declaration on Fundamentals Principles of Rights at Work. It is not necessary for a country to ratify the convention—simply being a member of ILO it has a moral obligation. This is what the government has ignored

while imposing the ESA.

If the issue is internationalised by the hotel unions by turning to the ILO, it could have far-reaching consequences for Nepal when the issue of our WTO membership comes up. There were enough provisions built within the Labour Act for government intervention in labour disputes—it need not have declare hotels essential services. So what can, or should, the government now do? Here are some pointers:

- Persuade the unions not to lodge a complaint with the ILO
- Get the prime minister (he must find the time) to directly intervene
- Ask the parties to negotiate in good faith
- If the management and unions cannot arrive at a consensus, ask the parties that they abide by the decision made by the PM—whatever it may be
- One technical compromise would be to scrap the present two percent tourist service fee (TSF) and replace it by ten percent to be shared by government, hotel management and the unions. ♦

(Narayan Manandhar is the Executive Director of the Industrial Relations Forum, and was also a consultant for the Legal Committee formed to study the service charge dispute)



# Thamel goes to the Oscars

The lure of 34" screens and the miraculously obtained copies of most nominated films make Thamel the best pre-Oscar destination in Kathmandu—blackouts, smelly toilets and all.

MARY MAKARUSHKA

When comedian Steve Martin hosts the 73rd annual Academy Awards this week, will you be rooting for the slashing broadswords of *Gladiator* or the flashing Green Destiny sword of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*? Which Steven Soderbergh do you favour for Best Director: the maker of the moody drug-war saga *Traffic* or the man behind *Erin Brockovich*, in which Julia Roberts' bosoms fight for justice? Though the Academy has mysteriously failed to invite the much-fêlitated Thinley Lundup Dorje to be a presenter, there's still plenty of reason to rise with the roosters (in Nepal that's 6.45am Monday morning, 26 March) to watch them hand out those little golden statues.

And for Kathmandu film fans, the good news is that Thamel's free-movie restaurants are currently running all five of the Best Picture nominees. *Chocolat*, *Gladiator*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* are playing in fairly heavy rotation, and *Traffic* and *Erin Brockovich* are both available upon request.

As for the top acting categories, cast your eyes over *Cast Away*, *Quills*, *Contender*, *Almost Famous*, *Shadow of the Vampire*, and *Requiem for a Dream*, and you'll have seen 15 of the 20 nominated performances. All of these are now available in Nepal, says Rajendra Manandhar, whose Flex Video in Chhetrapati has been supplying films to Thamel for 10 years.

A few years ago, these places were so packed that many people couldn't even get a reservation, recalls Thakur Aryal, manager of Cinderella, Thamel's longest-running movie restaurant. Now there are at least seven screens within a few blocks of each other playing films at 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, and 8pm daily, and not all *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Into Thin Air* either. Better yet, they're not all jammed with chain-smoking trekkers—sometimes you can practically have your own private screening room. Since so many restaurants opened, says Aryal, "no place is that full now."

And that competition means

OSCAR NOMINATIONS

**Best Picture**  
*Chocolat*  
*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*  
*Erin Brockovich*  
*Gladiator*  
*Traffic*

**Best Director**  
Stephen Daldry, *Billy Elliot*  
Ang Lee, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*  
Steven Soderbergh, *Erin Brockovich*  
Ridley Scott, *Gladiator*  
Steven Soderbergh, *Traffic*

**Best Actor**  
Tom Hanks, *Cast Away*  
Russell Crowe, *Gladiator*  
Javier Bardem, *Before Night Falls*  
Ed Harris, *Pollock*  
Geoffrey Rush, *Quills*

**Best Actress**  
Joan Allen, *Contender*  
Juliette Binoche, *Chocolat*  
Ellen Burstyn, *Requiem for a Dream*  
Laura Linney, *You Can Count on Me*  
Julia Roberts, *Erin Brockovich*

**Best Supporting Actor**  
Jeff Bridges, *Contender*  
Willem Dafoe, *Shadow of the Vampire*  
Benicio Del Toro, *Traffic*  
Albert Finney, *Erin Brockovich*  
Joaquin Phoenix, *Gladiator*

**Best Supporting Actress**  
Judi Dench, *Chocolat*  
Marcia Gay Harden, *Pollock*  
Kate Hudson, *Almost Famous*  
Frances McDormand, *Almost Famous*  
Julie Walters, *Billy Elliot*

See [www.oscars.com](http://www.oscars.com) for complete list.

you're not limited by the chalkboard choices anymore. None of the movie restaurants is planning any special pre-Oscar programming, but you and your friends are welcome to take over. Both Boogie Woogie Café and Free Movie Restaurant will let you pick the 10 am screening from their selection. Cinderella, Red Kohinoor, Royal Steak House, and Twa Dewa all promise to show your choice of movie if you request it one day ahead, whether you want something from their collection or a video from the shop. You pay only for your food, no extra charge for special movies (video rentals cost them Rs 15-Rs 30). This may be the only way to catch lesser-known treats like *Almost Famous* or *Contender*. Even without planning ahead, if there's nothing listed for that day that interests you, you can often find a restaurant with no customers waiting for the advertised offering and persuade the management to let you make a different choice from their library.

Thamel can be a tough place to watch movies (a blackout, a print that couldn't show the final 10 minutes, and a toilet that seemed determined to join us in the dining room are some of my less favourite screening experiences), but for the most part, this year's Best Picture hopefuls can stand the pressure. Romantics can hang on to every word of the newest release, the fairy tale *Chocolat* (in English, even though the title looks French)—the print I saw at Free Movie had remarkably clear sound and picture. In addition to a roguish Johnny Depp with an Irish accent, it's graced by Best Supporting Actress and Best Actress nominees Judi Dench and Juliette Binoche.

Experts predict Julia Roberts' titillating turn in *Erin Brockovich* is sure to win Best Actress. Based on a true story, it's about an uneducated single mother who uses her brains and her low-cut blouses in a lawsuit against a powerful corporation. Flex Video's only copy is full of glitches, but Free Movie manager Uttam Shrestha, who votes for *Brockovich* for Best Picture, says his version is just fine. The martial-arts masterpiece *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* can entertain no matter how noisy the audience thanks to the fantastically choreographed fight scenes. (It's also nominated for Best Foreign Language film, but it's dubbed into English.) *Traffic*, on the other hand, jumps between several interwoven plots, with maybe a quarter of the scenes in Spanish, and subtitles that wash out against the Mexican dust. You'll need a good print and a close-up seat in a quiet room to keep this excellent but complex movie from becoming an exercise in frustration.

Actually, maybe even *Traffic* would look good at the fairly new Twa Dewa, which boasts a 34" screen—the largest I found by a good five inches—with Dolby sound to boot. This baby is as close as you'll get to the big-screen experience in Thamel. Red Kohinoor also has a large TV, as well as the only room with a choice of chairs or cushions for seating. Unfortunately, though, its machine can't fast-forward or rewind, so if you've got a ragged print that jumps around, you're at its mercy. Sticking to selections from its

library may be safer than renting from the video store here. The smaller screens of the other restaurants are adequate for their room sizes—in most cases, you can follow the picture even from the back row. Another technology to keep in mind: Boogie Woogie, Cinderella, and Free Movie all have generators, so a power cut won't turn your screening into a cliffhanger.

Boogie Woogie often draws a crowd, which makes it a lively place to

watch cult favourites like *Road Trip* and *The Matrix*. Best Special Effects goes to its menu, which cleverly glows under blacklight so you can pick your dinner in the dark. All the menus are variations on the standard pizza-burger-curry mix, and none is going to be nominated for Thamel's Best Cooking. ♦

Mary Makarushka is a freelance journalist and former editor at Entertainment Weekly.

The pick of Thamel's free movie restaurants: All shows are at 1, 3, 6, and 8 daily	
<b>Boogie Woogie Café and Bar</b> In the alley to the left of KC's Restaurant. 434493	<b>Red Kohinoor at White Lotus Guest House</b> Thahity road, just south of Chhetrapati road, left-hand side. 258996
<b>Cinderella</b> Thahity road, right-hand side, a little south of Thamel Chowk. 251445	<b>Royal Steak House</b> In the courtyard across from KC's Restaurant
<b>Free Movie Restaurant</b> In the alley to the left of KC's Restaurant. 426747	<b>Twa Dewa</b> Between Thamel Chowk and Leknath Marg, right-hand side, near Bhagwati Temple. 418399
<b>Margarita's</b> South side of road to Chhetrapati, near JP School. 244084	

carlsburg



SAILL SUBEDI



# Are We Almost TAPPED OUT? Safeguarding every drop of clean water

We drink it, we generate electricity with it, we soak our crops in it. And we're stretching our supplies to breaking point. Will we have enough clean water to satisfy our needs? One of the world's foremost experts on freshwater resources takes stock of this precious liquid.

PETER GLEICK

More than one billion people around the world lack access to clean drinking water; some 2.5 billion do not have adequate sanitation services. Preventable water-related diseases kill an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 children every day, and latest evidence suggests that we are falling behind in efforts to solve these problems. Massive cholera outbreaks appeared in the mid-1990s in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Millions of people in Bangladesh and India drink water contaminated with arsenic. And the surging populations throughout the developing world are intensifying the pressures on limited water supplies. The effects of our water policies extend beyond jeopardising human health. Tens of millions of people have been forced to move from their homes—often with little warning or compensation—to make way for the

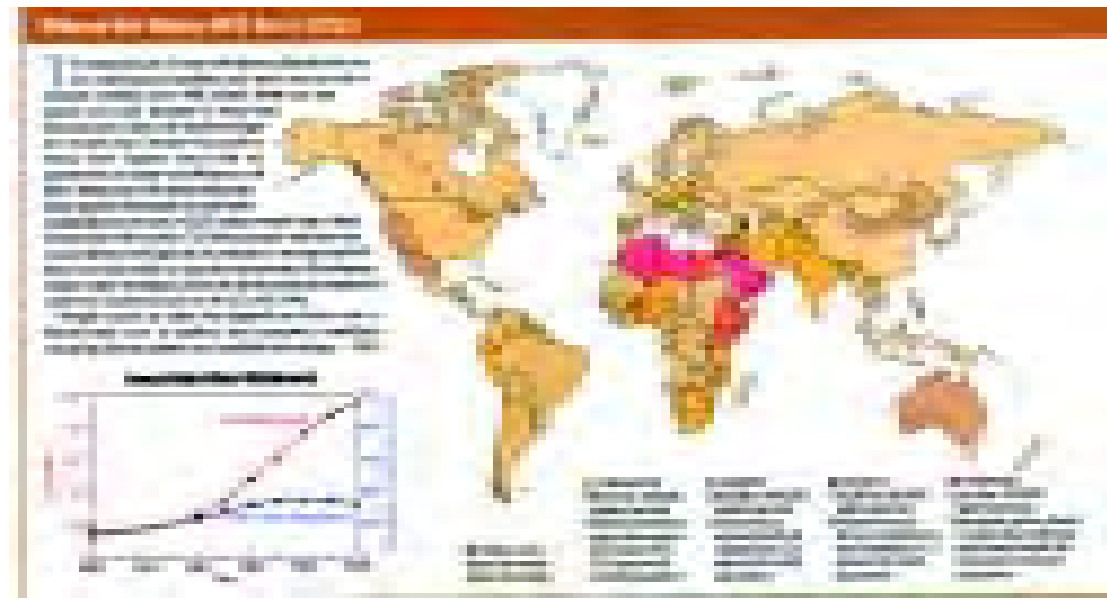
reservoirs behind dams. More than 20 percent of all freshwater fish species are now threatened or endangered because dams and water withdrawals have destroyed the free-flowing river ecosystems where they thrive. Certain irrigation practices degrade soil quality and reduce agricultural productivity, heralding a premature end to the green revolution. Groundwater aquifers are being pumped down faster than they are naturally replenished in parts of India, China, the US and elsewhere. And disputes over shared water resources have led to violence and continue to raise local, national and even international tensions. At the outset of the new millennium, however, the way resource planners think about water is beginning to change. The focus is slowly shifting back to the provision of basic human and environmental needs

as the top priority—ensuring some for all, instead of more for some. This means using existing infrastructure in smarter ways rather than building new facilities, which is increasingly considered the option of last, not first, resort. The challenges we face are to use the water we have more efficiently, to rethink our priorities for water use and to identify alternative supplies of this precious resource. This shift in philosophy has not been universally accepted, and it comes with strong opposition from some established water organisations. Nevertheless, it may be the only way to successfully address the pressing problems of providing everyone with clean water to drink, adequate water to grow food and a life free from preventable water-related illness. **Damage from dams** As environmental awareness has heightened globally, the desire to

protect—and even restore—some of the river systems destroyed by dams and embankments has grown. In many developing countries, grassroots opposition to the environmental and social costs of big water projects is becoming more and more effective. Villagers and community activists in India have encouraged a public debate over big dams. In China, where open disagreement with government policies is strongly discouraged, protest against the monumental Three Gorges Project has been unusually vocal and persistent. Until very recently, international financial organisations such as the World Bank, export-import banks and multilateral aid agencies subsidised or paid in full for dams or other water-related civil engineering projects—which often have price tags in the tens of billions of dollars. These organisations are slowly beginning to reduce or eliminate such subsidies, putting more of the financial burden on already strained national economies. Having seen so much ineffective development in the past—and having borne the associated costs (both monetary and otherwise) of that development—many governments are unwilling to pay for new structures to solve water shortages and other problems. A handful of countries are even taking steps to remove some of the most egregious and damaging dams. Fortunately—and unexpectedly—the demand for water is not rising as rapidly as some predicted. As a result, the pressure to build new water infrastructures has diminished over the past two decades. Although population, industrial output and

economic productivity have continued to soar in developed nations, the rate at which people withdraw water from aquifers, rivers and lakes has slowed. And in a few parts of the world, demand has actually fallen. **Demand's down—for how long?** What explains this remarkable turn of events? Two factors: people have figured out how to use water more efficiently, and communities are rethinking their priorities for water use. In 1965, for instance, Japan used approximately 13 million gallons of water to produce \$1 million of commercial output, by 1989 this had dropped to 3.5 million gallons (even accounting for inflation)—almost a quadrupling of water productivity. In the US, water withdrawals have fallen by more than 20 percent from their peak in 1980. As the world's population continues to grow, dams, aqueducts and other kinds of infrastructure will still have to be built, particularly in developing countries where basic human needs have not been met. But such projects must be built to higher standards and with more accountability to local people and their environment than in the past. And even in regions where new projects seem warranted, we must find ways to meet demands with fewer resources,

minimum ecological disruption and less money. The fastest and cheapest solution is to expand the productive and efficient use of water. In many countries, 30 percent or more of the domestic water supply never reaches its intended destinations, disappearing from leaky pipes, faulty equipment or poorly maintained distribution systems. The quantity of water that Mexico City's supply system loses is enough to meet the needs of a city the size of Rome, according to recent estimates. Even in more modern systems, losses of 10 to 20 percent are common. When water does reach consumers, it is often used wastefully. In homes, most water is literally flushed away. Before 1990, most toilets in the US drew about six gallons of water for each flush. In 1992 the US Congress passed a national standard mandating that all new residential toilets be low-flow models that require only 1.6 gallons per flush—a 70 percent improvement with a single change in technology. Even in the developing world technologies such as more efficient toilets have a role to play. Because of the difficulty of finding new water resources for Mexico City, city officials launched a water conservation programme that



Kulekhani reservoir is only "half-empty" as it awaits monsoon replenishment.



# “If Nepal needs more safe drinking water, why use it to flush toilets?”



Peter Gleick was in Kathmandu this month to attend an international conference on Water Resource Human Rights and Governance organised by Nepal Water Conservation Foundation and Institute for Social and Environmental Transition. He spoke to Nepali Times about the need to make more efficient use of the water we have.

California and many parts of the developed world have built the main infrastructure for water supply and energy, and there is now the luxury of having a choice of options. But basic infrastructure for water supply is lagging in places like Nepal. Don't we need to address these issues first, and think about efficiency and cutting waste later? Nepal has many options too. Basic water infrastructure is certainly needed, but it would be a mistake to ignore waste and improving efficiency. You have to decide what you need water for, and find the best way to provide it. You have to look at infrastructure from the ecological, hydrological and social points of view. The trouble is that we tend to look at only the supply side, and that is what we did in California in the early days: how can we bring ever-increasing amounts of water from the mountains to provide an ever-increasing demand in the cities. We built the physical infrastructure and we got the water, but we paid an ecological price for it. We found that although you have to meet the people's need for water, we also need to do it in a way that is comprehensive. We don't need water at a basic level, but we need it for waste disposal, for energy, for sanitation. Why build large, expensive dams to provide water that will be wasted?

Here in Kathmandu Valley there may well be a need for more basic infrastructure. I believe that water should be paid for, but when individuals and communities do not have even the most basic requirement of water for reasons of poverty, emergency or circumstance it is the responsibility of local communities and governments to work to provide basic water needs through subsidies or outright entitlement.

Most countries in the world have now given up building large dams, and in some countries even existing dams are being demolished. Here in the subcontinent, we see that there are flood-control and hydropower benefits of dams, but we also don't want to make the same mistakes as the West. Is there a way out?

Dams have brought benefits, and also brought great costs. In many parts of the world, the economic, ecological and political cost of building dams is now too high. In other parts of the world, we should not build dams the way we built them before. The World Commission on Dams worked two years on a report reviewing successes and failures in building dams. It doesn't say stop building dams. But it says if you want to build dams, you have to look at their true ecological, economic and other costs and benefits. We have to be conscious also about how decisions are made to build dams, are they inclusive, are they consultative with the people who will be affected. Then maybe the ones we do build will benefit the people. There is a right way and wrong way to go about dams. There are people who say all dams are bad, they are as wrong as those who say all dams are good. The truth is somewhere in between.

Here, in Nepal, we are looking at the role of pricing as a demand-side intervention in projects like Melamchi. How well has this worked in other countries?

This is a very important factor. Water should be properly priced, it is not a free good. But the reality in many countries is that the poor pay more for water than the rich, and they often get poor quality water. This brings up

questions of equity, justice, governance, and even human rights. Water, if properly priced, will be used more efficiently. We can also do better by matching needs with different types of water. If you need safe drinking water, why use it to flush toilets? If you need it for irrigation, industrial use then you work on the supply accordingly. You have to match quality with type of use.

Your institute has done a lot of work on climate change. What are the latest findings, especially as it pertains to mountain regions?

We carried out a two-year study in the United States. Without doubt, the most important finding of that study was that mountain regions where there is perpetual snow, ice, and glaciers are more vulnerable to rising temperatures. Glaciers around the world are receding at a rapid rate. By 2050, we estimate that the Glacier National Park in the United States will have no glaciers left. There has been a warming trend since the last ice age, but it has accelerated in the last 100 years. Our main concern is how this will affect the dynamics of water in a changing climate regime. It is no longer a question of whether there is climate change, but how, by how much, and what we are going to do about it. It is time to begin planning for a changing climate.



HIMAL SOUTHASIAN

involved replacing 350,000 old toilets. The replacement have already saved enough water to supply an additional 250,000 residents. And numerous other options for both industrial and non-industrial nations are available as well, including better leak detection, less wasteful washing machines, drip irrigation and water—conserving plants in outdoor landscaping. The largest single consumer of water is agriculture—and this use is largely inefficient. Water is lost as it is distributed to farmers and applied to crops. Consequently, as much as half of all water diverted for agriculture never yields any food. Thus, even modest improvements in agricultural efficiency could free up huge quantities of water. We can conserve water not only by altering how we choose to grow our food, but also by changing what we choose to eat.

New approaches to meet water needs will not be easy to implement: economic and institutional structures still encourage the wasting of water and the destruction of ecosystems. Among the barriers to better water planning and use are inappropriately

low water prices, inadequate information on new efficiency technologies, inequitable water allocations, and government subsidies for growing water-intensive crops in arid regions or building dams.

Part of the difficulty, however, also lies in the prevalence of old ideas among water planners. Addressing the world's basic water problems requires fundamental changes in how we think about water; and such changes are coming about slowly. Rather than trying endlessly to find enough water to meet hazy projections of future desires, it is time to find a way to meet our present and future needs with the water that is already available, while preserving the ecological cycles that are so integral to human well-being. ♦

Peter H. Gleick is director of the Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment and Security, a non-profit policy research think tank based in Oakland, California. Gleick co-founded the institute in 1987. (The article is adapted from the original that appeared in Scientific American, February 2001.)

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# Hacking the rich and famous

A restaurant worker is suspected of using the identities of some of America's richest celebrities to pull off the biggest theft in Internet history.





JANE MARTINSON IN NEW YORK

A restaurant worker is suspected of using the identities of some of America's richest celebrities and executives in a scam which local authorities describe as the biggest identity theft in Internet history. Abraham Abdallah, 32, a convicted fraudster, has been arrested, accused of infiltrating the financial accounts of over 200 people on *Forbes* magazine's annual list of richest people in the US. His alleged victims include Steven Spielberg and Oprah Winfrey from the world of entertainment, and Ted Turner, Warren Buffett, George Soros, Michael Bloomberg and Larry Ellison from the financial world. Abdallah is accused of using the web and his local Brooklyn library to track



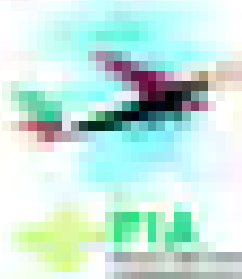
down confidential information and access bank, brokerage and credit card accounts. One piece of evidence found by the police was a well-worn copy of *Forbes* magazine with home addresses, telephone numbers, bank accounts and mothers' maiden names scrawled beside the billionaires' biographies. In several cases their all-important US social security numbers had also been written down. Abdallah allegedly used web-enabled mobile phones and virtual voicemail services to track packages ordered in his victims' names and pick up messages from anywhere in the US. Detective Michael Fabozzi of the New York Police Department (NYPD) told the *New York Post*: "There were so many packages going to so many places at one time, it's impossible to figure out how he kept

track of it all...but he did." The department believes Abdallah cloned the identities of his victims, setting up hundreds of bogus New York addresses for postal deliveries, before raiding their personal accounts. The police, who arrested their suspect as he picked up a delivery a month ago, are still trying to discover the extent of the fraud, which they believe lasted more than six months. Abdallah has been charged with criminal possession of forged devices and stolen property, and criminal impersonation. He denies the accusations. The case began in December when the NYPD was alerted to a suspicious request to transfer \$10 million from an account belonging to Thomas Siebel, founder of Siebel Systems, an electronics firm. Merrill Lynch, the brokerage firm, had contacted Siebel about the request because it conflicted with the requirements of the account. He said he knew nothing about it. The fraud squad traced the request to two Yahoo! email addresses. Merrill Lynch then found the same email used for five more billionaire clients. Requests to other Wall Street firms, which handle the personal accounts of America's wealthiest people, uncovered similar coincidences. The police found that many of the business addresses given to set up the accounts either did not exist or were shared by two billionaires at a time. ♦ (The Guardian)



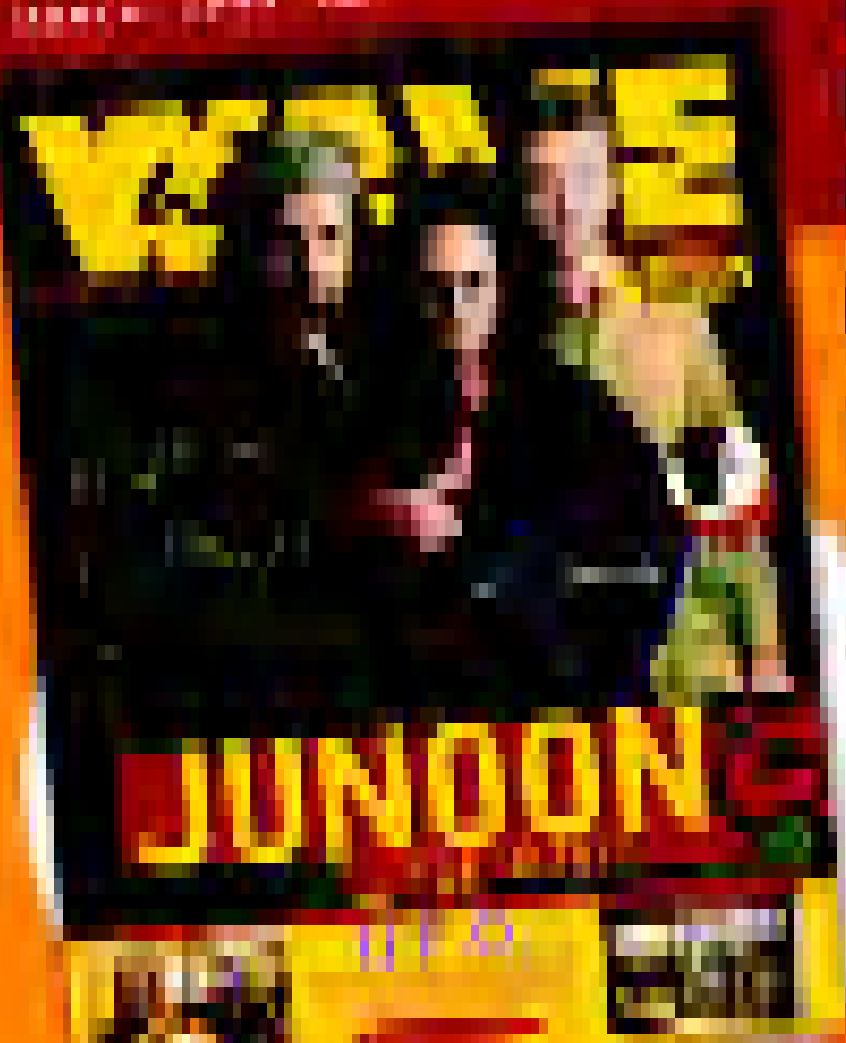
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MERCANTILE AD 28issue





STOCKHOLM - Two hundred years ago in his essay *Perpetual Peace* Immanuel Kant imagined a future “union of liberal republics”. In 1795, however, liberal republics were abstract ideas. Yet Kant imagined our present reality of flourishing liberal democracies. Moreover, Kant’s idea of perpetual peace seems even less far-fetched because no democracy has ever made war on another. Indeed, “No War Between Democracies” is as close as we are likely to get to an immutable diplomatic law.

Scholars have demonstrated the truth of this. Professor RJ Rummel of the University of Hawaii investigated 353 pairs of combatants between 1816 and 1991. Democracy fought non-democracy in 155 cases. Dictatorship fought dictatorship in 198 cases. He found no examples of democracies at war with each other. Some pedants quibble, claiming that exceptions exist. Study the details, however, and you find that the conflict in question was either some type of civil war or in which one participant was not a real democracy (Germany in 1914), or that the number of people killed was too low to call the conflict a war at all.

The costs humanity has paid in waiting for Kant’s vision to near reality is horrific and was exacted in places other than the battlefield. Between 1900 and 1987 about 170

# Perpetual peace

The cost humanity has paid in waiting for Kant’s vision to near reality is horrific and was exacted in places other than the battlefield.

million people were killed for political reasons not involving war. Totalitarian states murdered 1.38 million out of those 170 million. Authoritarian countries killed another 28 million. Democracies killed about 2 million people, primarily through intentional bombing of civilian targets. No matter how controversial examples of democratic excess are, however, they do not change the overall picture.

Most of this slaughter was triggered by Marxism/Leninism’s fusion of absolutist ideology with absolute power. To paraphrase Lord Acton’s dictum: power kills and absolute power kills absolutely. Many people reached other conclusions. When Marxists were strong and liberalism weak, writers, politicians, political parties, and newspapers often told us: democracy is unimportant for the Third World. Freedom in such countries is a “formality.” Far more urgent is not going hungry. So, we were lectured: liberalism is no solution for developing countries.

“Don’t measure others by our yardsticks,” a leading Swedish playwright/novelist wrote as Pol Pot’s regime exterminated a quarter of Cambodia’s population. What he meant was that the mass murder of Cambodians was not deplorable in the same way as the mass murder of Europeans is. This is inverted racism: you pretend to respect other peoples when, in fact, you despise them. Indeed, those in the West who praised Mao, Castro or Honecker

seldom wanted to import their terror. Try introducing the slightest limitation on free speech in any Western country and you will meet storms of protest from those who seldom champion it in Third World nations. Oppression is only acceptable for others.

Hypocrisy, of course, is not confined to the West. When leaders in, say, Singapore, Malaysia and mainland China talk about “Asian values” to romanticise their regimes, they, too, challenge the values of democracy. But Taiwan’s former President Lee Teng-hui uses these arguments as thin alibis for anti-democratic policies. When it comes to human rights, says Lee, there are no special Asian values. Freedom is a universal value.

Despite communism’s collapse, assaults on liberalism remain. Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in economics, demonstrated empirically that no famine—mass starvation leading to mass death—ever occurred in a democratically governed country. During the Bengal famine of 1943, two to three million people died from hunger. That happened under British rule. Since India became independent in 1947 with a multiparty democratic system, the country has never suffered such a disaster. Undernourishment, malnutrition, crop failures, and food scarcities have occurred, but there have been no famines. Compare that with Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” of 1958-1961 when 30 million Chinese died of hunger. That’s ten times the

number of Indians who died in the gigantic starvation of British India less than twenty years before.

Sen also examined various African countries that experienced crop failures and food shortages. Governments under democratic pressures usually act forcefully and decently on such occasions; people under dictatorial regimes are often hit by government-induced and manipulated famines. Where political opposition and a free press are active, governments cannot neglect thousands of people starving to death. When opposition is silenced and mass media voices only the dictator’s propaganda, millions of people dying from famine can be kept secret and/or ignored.

Elie Wiesel, survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald and a Nobel Peace laureate, once said: “Let us remember the heroes of Warsaw, the martyrs of Treblinka, the children of Auschwitz. They fought alone, they suffered alone, they lived alone, but they did not die alone, for something in all of us died with them.” What died with them? My answer is this: the idea that there are limits to human cruelty. Now we recognise that there are no limits. Knowing empirically the benefits in terms of peace and human welfare which democracy delivers, we must reaffirm our commitment to, and the necessity of, spreading Kant’s vision. ♦ *(Project Syndicate)*

*Per Ahlmark is a former Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden.*

## Bush designate to UN draws flak

Human rights organisations in the Honduras expressed surprise and anger when they learned of the new United States ambassador-designate to the United Nations, John Negroponte, who they say is tied to past acts of repression and torture. “It has been a shock because we believe Negroponte was the link between the policies of the Pentagon and the Honduran military personnel who violated human rights here,” Andrés Pavón, head of the Honduran Human Rights Defence Committee, said. US President Bush announced his designation of Negroponte last week as the country’s new representative before the UN, despite the diplomat’s apparently dark past. Bush asserted that the controversial diplomat will be “a key member of my administration’s foreign policy team.”

Human rights organisations accuse Negroponte, US ambassador to the Honduras in the 1980s, of concealing the Honduran army’s assassinations, kidnappings and torture from a US Congress inquiry. The diplomat, who must still obtain Congressional approval before beginning work at the UN, represented the United States in Honduras during a critical time, when Washington financed what were known as the “Contras” in their fight against the Sandinista-led government of Nicaragua.

The largely Nicaraguan Contras, with some 15,000 troops, were based across the border in the Honduras and launched their attacks from there. The Honduran military, meanwhile, internally applied the “anti-terrorist law” enacted by the Roberto Suazo Córdova government (1982-1986). Pavón stated that a figure as dubious as Negroponte should not even be considered for a post in the world’s most powerful diplomatic body.

He added that his organisation possesses testimony from the top Honduran military brass that implicates Negroponte in the repression in the 1980s. Other human rights groups in the Honduras maintain that the military here received training from the CIA and that Negroponte was directly involved in arranging it.

The Honduran National Human Rights Commissioner, Leo Valladares, said: “It is nearly impossible that Negroponte did not know about the human rights violations.” The constitutionally ranked official is the equivalent of a People’s Defender or Ombudsman. Negroponte “kept quiet” about the assassinations and disappearances in the Honduras, said Valladares, and such a precedent surely casts doubt on his competence to serve at the UN. *(IPS)*

## Development prevents conflict

STOCKHOLM - Development aid may be the greatest contribution the EU can make to preventing conflicts, but the impact of that contribution is seriously reduced by the lack of a harmonised foreign policy among member states, Poul Nielson, EU Commissioner for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid said recently.

Referring to the 60,000 armed military personnel under the European Security and Defence Policy, he said: “My colleague [EU External Relations] Commissioner Chris Patten and I strongly agree that the best and cheapest solution would be if we never had to use them.” Nielson added: “It is argued that military capability gives credibility to foreign policy. In principle, I agree. This is one of the main lessons from the Balkans. But when dealing with developing countries, the analysis has to be nuanced. Zimbabwe and Serbia are two different situations and the decision-making parameters of a Mugabe and a Milosevic are not the same. Nor is the credibility of any European threat of military intervention.”

“In Africa, Europe’s credibility comes from our development co-operation,” said Nielson, himself a former Danish development minister. He said the EU was attacking some of the main root causes of conflicts: poverty, demographic pressure and competition for scarce natural resources such as water and land, and that the EU was also ready “to make capacity-building, hard-core, big-money” development co-operation. “We are dealing with weak states requiring institutional capacity-building. After all, a crisis of state legitimacy is at the origin of many rebel movements,” he said.

“Donors support land reform, empowerment of women, indigenous peoples’ causes, minority groups and human rights. This may all fuel conflict. Freezing migration flows is another example,” said Nielson. Still, he said the EU might be able to integrate the security sector into its development cooperation, looking at military spending and police forces. He said it had to be acknowledged that preventing conflicts (in developing countries) is often beyond the reach of development cooperation, as some conflicts have a long and complicated history, flowing from religious, tribal and colonial origins. “In some cases, military solutions may be necessary,” he said, but most conflicts could not “be stopped by fine-tuning development cooperation through marginal adjustment of this or that aid instrument.” *(IPS)*

## Brothel opens doors to disabled

MELBOURNE – A brothel has installed a wheelchair ramp and other facilities for the handicapped in what advocates hope will be the start of a nation-wide trend. The Pink Palace recently opened what is believed to be the first disabled access room in an Australian brothel, with enlarged doors to accommodate wheelchairs and a sit-down shower. Groups for the handicapped praised the move, saying they hoped other brothels will do the same.

George Taleporos, a graduate student doing a doctorsal thesis on sexuality and physical disability, said Wednesday the brothel’s facilities mean handicapped people can visit it alone without a carer. “The thing about having independent access to a facility like this is that the experience can be more private and personal, and fewer people need to know about what you are doing,” he said. Talaperos, who is confined to a wheelchair, said many disabled people visit commercial sex workers and brothels because it is difficult to find sexual partners. *(Asian Age)*

# Macedonia’s turn to burn



Violence in Macedonia threatens to draw in Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, and suck NATO-led peacekeepers in Kosovo into the fighting.

**RORY CARROLL** IN TETOVO  
Ethnic Albanian guerrillas battling Macedonian forces issued a declaration of war last week, calling on all ‘able-bodied men’ to join their uprising in favour of self-rule. They also ordered ethnic Albanians serving in Macedonia’s armed forces to desert.

The call came as the United Nations issued a chilling warning to the international community that Europe was facing the threat of a massive refugee crisis in the region, following the worst day of fighting in the former Yugoslav republic since

trouble erupted last week. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, warned of an impending humanitarian crisis as residents of Tetovo, the city at the centre of the fighting, continued to flee the city. He said: “We cannot afford another humanitarian tragedy in the Balkans where millions have been uprooted by violent conflicts in the last decade.”

The general call up—put out by the self-styled National Liberation Army which appeared in Macedonia two months ago—came as world leaders contemplated for the first time the horrifying prospect of a full-scale

war in Macedonia that threatens to divide the country along ethnic lines. Macedonia split from Yugoslavia a decade ago and had been the only former republic to secede without violence. Now the international community fears the growing conflict could ignite a conflagration that threatens to draw in Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey and suck NATO-led peacekeepers in Kosovo into the fighting.

In a worrying new development ethnic Albanian guerrillas in the neighbouring Presevo Valley of southern Serbia—who with the NLA are fighting for a ‘Greater Kosovo’ linking Albanian areas outside Kosovo—broke a week-long ceasefire and appeared on the verge of opening a new front in their escalating border war. Last week Albanian leaders in Macedonia hardened their support for the extremists behind the rebellion. “We would welcome international mediation, but I fear we are running out of time,” said Fadil Sulejmani, rector of the once-outlawed University of Tetovo, a centre for young Albanian radicals. “This is becoming a kind of holy war.”

The latest escalation of the fighting has found NATO and the international community in disarray over how to end the violence, amid fears among European government’s over America’s commitment to the Balkans. US peacekeeping forces in

Kosovo have been criticised for standing by as former KLA fighters crossed the border into Macedonia to launch their rebellion.

Tetovo was again the scene of the heaviest fighting. Soldiers in the largely Albanian-populated city used heavy machine guns mounted on armoured personnel carriers to unleash torrents of fire into the surrounding mountains, while snipers tried to pick off insurgents in the forest above. Smoke plumed from burning trees and blasts boomed through empty streets as people fled the city or hid.

At the Albanian rebels’ headquarters in Selce, a mile from Tetovo, new recruits continued to pour in. In an effort to contain the violence Greece announced that it would host talks with the foreign ministers of Albania and Macedonia to negotiate a ceasefire. NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson, on a visit to Athens, said NATO forces were responding to Macedonian calls for NATO-led peacekeepers in Kosovo to shut off the flow of arms and weapons into Macedonia and Serbia. The growing crisis in the Balkans is likely to top the agenda at the EU heads of state meeting in Stockholm later this week. Ethnic Albanians account for at least a quarter of Macedonia’s 2 million people, dominating western regions of the country and parts of the capital. ♦ *(The Observer)*





The Punatsangchu by the Wangdiphodrang dzong.

**SIOK SIAN PEK** IN THIMPHU  
The nomadic Brokpa yak herdsman, inhabiting a remote area of Bhutan, were at first suspicious of the solar energy panels when these were set up six years ago. The Brokpa people live in an area that is reached after driving

three days east of the capital city Thimphu and then walking another three days over difficult mountain terrain.  
A large proportion of Bhutan's 650,000 people live in habitations that can be more than a day's walk across hills, away from the nearest

# Scarcity amidst plenty

Ironically, many Bhutanese are starved of electricity even as the country is exporting power.

road. Not surprisingly, only 30 percent of the population lives in homes with electricity.  
However, more and more Bhutanese living in remote areas are now lighting up their houses using solar energy. The Bropka community now makes yak cheese and butter, working under solar lights in their homes at night. Students in a school in Pemagatshe—a district about four days' journey from the capital—wrote to the national newspaper *Kuensel* that they could pass their examination because solar electricity allowed them to study longer hours after dark. Buddhist monks living in a monastery in Gasa Dzong, at the foot of a Himalayan glacier in the north of the country, can now read ancient scriptures at night thanks to solar power. The monastery now has a computer, powered by solar electricity.  
Ironically, Bhutanese are starved of electricity even as the country is exporting power. Bhutan is tapping its fast-flowing mountain rivers to produce four times more

hydroelectricity than it can use. The surplus power is sold to India, which has helped finance most hydroelectricity schemes in Bhutan. The Bhutanese government hopes to generate 90 percent of its annual revenue from power sales by the year 2010. "The power sector can provide an answer to our goal of self reliance and sustainable development," says Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, the head of the Bhutanese government.  
According to government estimates, Bhutan has the potential to generate about 30,000 MW of electricity from its rivers. The country's first major hydroelectricity scheme was the 336 MW Chukha scheme commissioned in the year 1988. The 60 MW Kurichu project in eastern Bhutan is scheduled to start production next year, while the giant Tala hydroelectricity scheme in the south will start producing 1020 MW after two years. The 22 MW Basochu project in the west of the country is also nearing completion.  
However, Bhutanese power

officials say that the country faces a disadvantage in power sales because this cannot be sold beyond India, making it easier for New Delhi to dictate the price. "The risk is that, being landlocked, we are forced to put all our eggs in one basket. It is difficult to sell power beyond India," says an official. Bhutan's abundant hydroelectricity is also of little use to most Bhutanese. The rugged mountain terrain makes power transmission highly expensive. The average cost of lighting up a Bhutanese house is estimated at about 100,000 Nu (about \$2,100). It is difficult to cover the cost because electricity is highly subsidised, with users paying less than one Nu per unit, which costs three to seven times as much to produce and distribute to urban and rural consumers. Most of the power is consumed in the two largest urban centres—Thimphu and the southern border town of Phuentsholing, which are home to about one-tenth of the Bhutanese population.

Bhutanese power officials are quick to point out that hydropower projects are in keeping with the country's strong commitment to environmental conservation. Most of the projects are run-of-the-river schemes where the water is not dammed up in a reservoir. Bhutan is known for its thick forests, with nearly three-fourths of the country under green cover.  
However, this is under threat from growing firewood consumption in the mainly rural nation. A survey by the environmental group, Royal Society for the Protection of Nature, found that on average, every Bhutanese consumes some 2.4 cubic metres of wood every year. Bhutan, where 90 percent of home fuel needs are met by firewood, has the world's highest per capita wood use.  
Until it finds cheaper ways of taking hydroelectricity to the distant areas of the kingdom, Bhutan is relying on environment-friendly, alternative energy sources like solar and small-scale water power schemes. There are 13 mini-hydroelectricity projects, which produce between 50 to 200 KW, and serve local communities. ♦ (IPS)

## ANALYSIS

by ANIL NETTO

# Underclass angst



Heavy police presence in the run down sections of Petaling Jaya.

The ethnic nature of the clashes masked the emergence of a frustrated underclass in Malaysia, long touted as the next Asian tiger economy.

PENANG – The recent ethnic violence did not erupt in the upper-class, multi-ethnic residential area of Damansara near Kuala Lumpur, or in its trendy Bangsar neighbourhood with posh nightspots and watering holes. Instead, Malaysia's worst ethnic clashes since 1969, when violence erupted between Malays and Chinese Malaysians, broke out in some of the poorest areas just outside Kuala Lumpur.  
The clashes have been largely portrayed overseas as racial rioting between ethnic Malays and Indians that has marred Malaysia's record of social harmony. The local media downplayed the ethnic aspect but failed to highlight the socio-economic forces that may have sparked them. The ethnic nature of the clashes has masked the undercurrents and the emergence of a frustrated underclass in Malaysia, long touted as the next Asian tiger economy. The clashes between Malay Muslims and ethnic Indians erupted 8 March in run-down

sections of Petaling Jaya, a largely upper-middle class residential town just next door to Kuala Lumpur. Six people were reported killed, 52 hurt and 190 detained.  
In socio-economic terms, "the area is one of the worst areas around Kuala Lumpur," says professor Ishak Shari, head of the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS). "I suppose the feeling of dissatisfaction must have been brewing all along." These neighbourhoods have plank squatter houses, longhouses, low-cost flats and terrace houses—largely populated by Malays, Indian Malaysians, and Indonesian and Bangladeshi migrant workers. The majority are from the lower income group and work in factories and small businesses. Some 60 percent of 22 million Malaysians are ethnic Malays or indigenous people—about 50 percent of the people are Malays, almost all of who are Muslim. A quarter are Malaysian Chinese, while eight percent are

ethnic Indian.  
For several years now, some academics have been pointing to a growing underclass in Malaysian society, the result of an unbridled, lopsided approach to "development". During his 20-year tenure as premier, Mahathir Mohammad has pursued a model of heavy industrialisation, complete with towering skyscrapers, a glittering airport and an impressive Formula One racing circuit. But he has neglected social security nets for the poor.  
How one defines poverty in the country is problematic to start with. The official poverty line in peninsular or western Malaysia, where Kuala Lumpur is, in 1997 was 460 ringgit (\$121) a month for a household of 4.6, says Ishak. If that figure is used, Malaysia's level of poverty does not look so bad—8 percent overall in 1998 with urban poverty less than 5 percent. But most households need a combined income of 1,000 ringgit (\$263), to meet the demands of modern urban living, figures Ishak. The Malaysian Trades Union Congress has been demanding a minimum monthly wage of 900 ringgit (\$237).  
This is the crux: many among the working class barely earn that amount. Those at the lower end of the ladder, especially plantation workers, general workers and labourers, struggle to earn 500 ringgit (\$132) monthly. Before the Asian crisis in mid-1997, academics had argued that 750 ringgit (\$197) would be a more appropriate gauge of the minimal cost of living for urban households, said a report prepared by the Malaysian Institute for Economic Research

for the UNDP in 1998.  
Given this measure, during the boom decade between 1985 and 1995, the percentage of poor households increased from 14.3 to 23 percent, much of the rise occurring in the urban areas. "With reduced income through retrenchments or pay cuts, and price hikes in fixed cost necessities such as food and utilities, poor urban households will suffer a noticeable decline in welfare," the report added. There have been rural poverty alleviation programmes, but no specific ones related to urban poverty, it noted.  
Squatter areas and low-income housing in Malaysia are congested, high-density areas. The squalid conditions and poverty in squatter areas are breeding grounds for gangs and drug addicts. There's little space for weddings, funerals and other public functions. Tempers are easily frayed even among the same ethnic group when neighbours infringe into one another's often un-demarcated private zones.  
When this involves people of different ethnic groups, the situation could get ugly. An often unnoticed factor is the sense of deprivation the poor feel, heightened when they live next door to the wealthy. "It is easier to compare yourself with the well-to-do in such a situation," says Ishak. Social tensions are not helped any by race-based politicking in Malaysia—in which the main ethnic groups Malays, Chinese and Indians are urged by the government's ruling coalition to unite to protect the interests of their groups. This makes conditions ripe for inter-ethnic frustration, where each group blames the other for its problems.  
Despite the dashes analysts believe the ethnic situation in Malaysia has improved since the 1980s—this explains why the dashes have not spread to other multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. ♦ (IPS)

## Congress comeback in India?

NEW DELHI – India's main opposition Congress party, in the political wilderness since 1996 for past venality, sees chances for revival in the arms bribery scandal that has rocked the political party and government led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.  
This week, the Congress party, led by Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born heir to the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, stalled the budget session of Parliament demanding the government's resignation over the scam, which involves Bangaru Laxman, the president of Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Congress' calls were echoed by left-wing and socialist political formations.  
Journalists from the website *Teheka* ("Sensation"), posing as arms dealers, used spy cameras to capture Laxman on tape accepting cash and promising to promote a fictitious deal selling hand-held thermal cameras to the Indian army. *Teheka*'s expose forced the resignation of Laxman and Defence Minister George Fernandes.  
Vajpayee announced a probe into the scandal by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court. The investigation also implicated top bureaucrats, army officers and bigwigs in the ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).  
Confident that the Congress cannot muster the required numbers in Parliament, Vajpayee has responded by challenging it to a trial-of-strength in the lower house of Parliament. But the Congress wants the government to resign on moral grounds, no matter the numbers. Gandhi, supported by left-wing and socialist groups, successfully ousted a Vajpayee-led NDA government in April 1999. But groups like the powerful Samajwadi Party wouldn't support her candidature as prime minister because of her foreign birth. A large faction of the Congress party splintered away to form the National Congress Party (NCP) on similar grounds. Elections were called and the Congress suffered its worst ever defeat. The BJP and its allies went on to form the present 17-month-old government.  
Now Gandhi says the Congress will be more accommodating of allies in a possible alternative coalition including the People's Front, an alliance of left and socialist opposition parties launched after the *Teheka* exposé. The Congress' immediate concern is elections to four state assemblies where its chances of winning may have improved considerably. The outcome of upcoming elections in eastern Assam and West Bengal, southern Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and the centrally-ruled former French enclave of Pondicherry in Tamil Nadu, will be a verdict on the rule of the Vajpayee government. But the Congress has yet to live down charges that former leader Rajiv Gandhi collected kickbacks in a deal to buy howitzers from the Swedish gun maker Bofors in the mid-eighties. Hearings are still continuing—15 years after the deal was struck. (IPS)



Major Maoist achievements of five years

Maoist leader, CP Gajurel (Comrade Gaurav) writing in Mahima, 15 March

The movement started by our party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has accomplished a lot in the last five years. On 12 February this year our movement entered its sixth year. On this historic occasion, I would first like to salute the 1,600 comrades who have become martyrs for the cause, those thousands of our party members who are tortured and locked up in jail, people who have disappeared, all party members, our people's army, people's militia, people who support our revolution, our well-wishers, both in the country and outside, all other party affiliates and the general people.



The major gain so far is the formation of the people's government. Mao always said the formation of the people's government is the central point of any revolution or revolutionary. The formation of the people's government is our aim, too. Our immediate aim is to destroy or get rid of the present system, which is feudal, class-ridden and is in the grip of corrupt middlemen and rich people, and establish a people's government.

The formation of a government or a ruling body always has to be the final aim of any revolution, otherwise it is fruitless. Our party is moving in the direction of forming such a government. The central aim of any revolution in the world is the formation of the people's government, and therefore this power that we have gained after the sacrifice of many, many people, we consider the main achievement of our party so far. People who do not understand the formation of our people's government, do not understand the essence of our revolution nor will they ever understand the science of revolutions.

The formation of our local governments is based on the path shown by Mao. Mao said that the villages should surround the cities and then slowly take them over. This will be a slow, drawn-out process, but the end result will be what we have always wanted. Local areas will not be formed if the party does not show clear, precise ideas and thinking. If the parameters of the revolution are not drawn, then that revolution will just move in circles and not achieve anything. The formation of our people's government is a blow to all the opportunists in the country and proves that a people's government can still be formed in this rapidly changing world. By studying our movement and thinking, many like-minded parties are slowly moving in the direction we have shown.

The formation of the people's war groups is the second most important achievement of our movement. Mao said that armed forces were the only possessions of the people, the absence of which meant that the people do not own anything. The formation and the working of the people's army in Nepal has proved Mao's thinking to be true. It is true that if we did not have the people's army, we would not have been able to form the people's government, nor have the resources or basis to strengthen it. A class struggle will take place until a class system remains in society. A class struggle will remain and its main aim will be the subjugation of class enemies. For that, the army is the main weapon.

When we started our revolution in 1996, we did not have the people's army. Our army was not a different entity. At that time there were no clear differences between our army and other wings of our organisation. We started with these teams, fought with them and slowly, after making a lot of sacrifices, we have formed our people's army. Our army is now so powerful that the national police has also accepted defeat.

In our struggle, we have now come to a point where the CPN (Maoist) have become an established party of the country. Not only this, we have now established our presence in the international arena too. Two political forces are present in the country. One is a very old system, which has become weak, outdated and irrelevant with the passage of time. People have now started shunning this system and are eagerly supporting the new system, which is very active in many parts of the country. In areas where the new system is in play, the old system is being rapidly uprooted and thrown out, and will never return. In the same way there are at the present moment two armies in Nepal, one that has been formed by the people and their sacrifices and is called the peoples' army, and another, the slave of the class society, which is corrupt and class-ridden. Both armies are preparing to defend their ground.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

I fail to see the injustice of a situation where the Maoists respond in similar terms after Singha Darbar began speaking with guns using the money paid in taxes by the people.  
—Former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Daman Nath Dhungana, in Janadesh, 20 March



Look at me! I've begun feeling like a lion since yesterday.

पुनर्जागरण Punarjagaran, 20 March

Army against smuggling maybe

Nepali Patra, 16 March

Finally it is out in the open that the government has always suspected the actions and workings of public servants and other bureaucrats. Stating that there is unlimited and uncontrollable smuggling of goods along Nepal's borders with India and China, the government has started deploying the army at these check posts to monitor border crossings. This action of the government proves that the bureaucracy has so far been very incompetent. The government has posted the army at the Birgunj and Tatopani borders.

The Finance Ministry will have overall command of these forces which will be used at its discretion. Earlier, people posted at most customs areas in the country were transferred when the finance minister changed. This has now been stopped, but it is said that the army may not be very effective under the command of the Finance Ministry. Although the army has been deployed, their hands are tied.



This action of the government has bewildered black marketeers, but has received the support of all legitimate business people. In the initial stage, forces are being posted only at the Tatopani and Birgunj custom areas. Seventy soldiers have been posted at Birgunj and 30 at Tatopani. At a later stage, armed forces personnel will be deployed at all the customs check posts of the country. The Finance Ministry had expected to collect close to Rs 52 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year in customs revenues, but was able to collect only Rs 23 billion. This is a shortfall of over 50 percent. The army has been deployed to strengthen revenue collection. The armed forces posted at the check posts will examine all material entering the country. They will be allowed to carry out sudden inspections and if anyone tries obstruct their functioning, they are allowed to open fire. The catch is that in carrying out all the above functions, they will have to get permission from the chief of customs. So what will actually happen is that the army will not be able to work independently. Their hands will always be tied by the customs chief, a civilian who, in most cases, works hand in glove with major political parties and business people.

Corrupting the army

Saptabik Bimarsa, 16 March

On 14 March, the government announced that the army would be deployed to check smuggling at the main customs check posts. Until now the police have been used to man and check smuggling in border areas. This has raised many questions about the conduct of the army. The army seems very reluctant to take on the Maoists, but rushes forward when it comes to manning customs posts. People

are very suspicious now. They are asking, "Why is the army not prepared to take on the Maoists?" After all, the army is an armed organisation and its duty is to provide security to the citizens of the country. It is the only agency in the country that can take on the Maoists. It has been raised and supported with the hard earned money of the citizens and was never formed to perform civilian duties. It is there to provide security and it should just do that. This has not gone down well with the people. Questions are being raised and the citizens need answers.

Will the army not be tempted by the cash that flows around customs check posts? A lot of financial activities take place in customs areas, and how long can the army resist the temptation of monetary benefits. Soon the army will also start collecting money at these check posts and then what next? What happens after the army acquires a taste for smuggling? It will be very difficult to remove the army from the customs areas and the problem will remain as it was in the beginning. This definitely will not benefit anyone.

Army guinea pigs

Jana Aastha, 14 March

"Are people in the armed forces guinea pigs?" The answer should be "no", but it seems that personnel of the Nepali army are to be used as such, because of the greed of higher-ups in the army and some army doctors. A hospital in America has invented a new vaccine for hepatitis C and is going to test this new drug on the armed forces of Nepal. The army has agreed. Surprisingly, this very drug was tested on some people in Patan exactly a year ago. In the earlier experiments, the testing was started secretly but later, to get more people involved, the authorities announced that they were testing a new drug and people who wanted to be experimented on could contact the authorities. People came to know of the side effects and so no one volunteered. Public outrage was vocal, and the tests were stopped. A person who had come to study this new drug while it was being tested said that a total of 44 people were tested and two of them exhibited side effects—their faces started to swell up slowly. The company carrying out the tests agreed to compensate those volunteers, and also provide help to people manifesting side effects. Now the company has agreed to provide treatment free of cost to all army people who develop side effects. Army sources state that although the company has promised to treat all army personnel who develop side effects, it most probably will not.

Sources say that prior to carrying out these tests in Nepal, they had been carried them out on 88 very poor Americans, and 44 people in Patan. The questions now arise, "How could an experiment stopped a year ago be carried out again? What are the benefits to the army? On a personal basis, who benefits?" Sources in the army say that the army chief was also in favour of using his people as guinea pigs. Four doctors at the army hospital are preparing to carry out the tests. They have not told army personnel on whom these experiments are to be carried out.

When asked about the earlier

experiments, the reason they were stopped, and the resumption of testing, this time on the armed forces, Dr Kishor Jung Rana of the army hospital completely evaded the questions and said if more information was required, the army hospital should be contacted. In fact, he did all he could to evade the questions and referred all enquiries to the hospital. The army chief, as his reward for permitting the tests, will be treated to a long vacation in America very soon.

Jajarkot's terrible schools

Jana Ahwan, 16 March

Mahinarayan Yadav teaches Sanskrit at Laxmi Middle School in Khurpa, Jajarkot. He cannot even speak Nepali properly, is from Saptari and is actually a maths teacher. Besides Sanskrit and maths, he teaches science too. There are only eight teachers in the school. There are not sufficient teachers and therefore each teacher teaches more than one subject. Since most teachers are not qualified to teach more than one subject, students do not understand what they are taught. Karna Bahadur Singh, the Class 10 topper, says that although they do not understand anything the teacher teaches, they are forced to tell the teachers they understand everything. Man Bahadur Khadka of Class 9 says, "How do you expect us to understand, when the teacher himself cannot speak Nepali properly. We come to school, spend two to four hours in class, play volleyball and then return home." Only a few students attend class, the rest spend their time playing volleyball. Most of the students at Laxmi School do that now. Fewer than 50 percent of the students enrolled attend school. Besides, only half the syllabus is taught in any given year. No one is bothered, students do not understand what they are taught and they don't do their homework. No one cares, neither the teachers nor the students. Headmaster Mishri Lal Choudhary spends more than 15 days a month in Khalanga. He is not interested in getting more teachers for his school or in providing quality education. He just wants to complete his tenure and then pack his bags. Students complain that most of the time Choudhary is not present in school. He teaches English and he has not completed even half the course for the SLC exams. Last year, no one from this school passed their SLC exams in the first division. Singh the top student in Class 10, was the only one to pass Class 9, and he too got only 32 in maths.

Most schools in Jajarkot suffer from this disease called "lack of teachers". Most of the teachers present are not properly qualified and they have become teachers through political connections only.

Another problem the schools face is that they don't have chairs or tables. The chairman of the managing committee of the school, Prithvi Bahadur Singh, says they have never given this any thought. Students are forced to sit on grass, mud and dust and continue with their classes. Students return home around three every evening. There are seven periods a day, meaning seven subjects should be taught, but this has never happened here. In most cases this is so because of the lack of teachers.



# Potting it in



It takes more than just a hard strike to pot the ball. Snooker is a game of calculations, precision and control over cue stick and ball.

## ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

The Valley is crawling with snooker and pool parlours filled with would-be and wannabe rulers of the game. And it's not just within the Valley that the game has made its presence felt. From Namche to Nepalgunj the balls are rolling. "There are snooker joints even in places like Namche where there aren't any roads and the tables have to be carried up there," says Rajesh Bajracharya, joint secretary of the Billiards, Snooker and Pool Association of Nepal (BSPAN). And forget your impression that snooker, billiards and pool are pastimes of the wealthy alone. It's a different story now, though at an average of Rs 100-Rs 140 per hour, they're still not terribly cheap recreation. But go to a

pool parlour any time after office hours and it is highly unlikely you'll get a table. They are filled with men, the young and middle-aged, the working and the unemployed. "I used to play every day but now it's more a once a week event," says Sailesh Shaky, a one-time snooker addict from Tahachal. Snooker addicts with a bit of cash spend hours betting against one another, trying to decide who's boss. Snooker's vast popularity in Nepal is a phenomenon of the last decade, and the developments in the game and rising standards are something to be proud of. The BSPAN was formed in 1994 and a new governing body took over two years ago. Unlike other sports associations whose work has been

marred by controversial charges of corruption, the BSPAN has a cleaner image. To be sure, the financial stakes are not very high, but given the limited resources of the Association, the members' attempts to promote the game owe more to dedication than the promise of moolah. Their efforts are paying off, and there are a host of private companies willing to sponsor championships and tournaments. The new governing body of the BSPAN, with industrialist Suraj Baidya as president, was elected two years ago. In this short time, the association has already organised four major tournaments, all sponsored by private companies like Surya Tobacco, Carlsberg, Toyota and San Miguel. These tournaments are very popular, and the bigger the cash prize offered by the sponsors, the greater the excitement. At the Surya Nepal Snooker Challenge that ended last Saturday, Rajan Lama of Chorten Snooker, Baudha and Tashi Wangchuk of Heaven's Snooker also in Baudha, played out a game that had the packed hall at Cosmos Solarium in Tripureswor resounding with oohs and aahs. Rajan defeated Wangchuk 7-4 in the eleventh frame in a set of thirteen games, and walked away with a trophy and cash prizes totalling Rs 62,000—Rs 51,000 for first place, and Rs 11,000 for the biggest break of 58 points. Lama bagged the Carlsberg Snooker Championship last year on the same date. Runner-up Wangchuk earned Rs 30,000 and a trophy. The total prize money—Rs 173,000—is the largest amount given out at a snooker tournament in Nepal until now.



Winner Rajan Lama receiving a check of Rs 51000 from TV Ramaswamy of STC.

Snooker parlours have an average of three tables that can cost anywhere between half a million rupees each if you want a British board and Rs 150,000 for one made in Nepal. Contrary to popular perception, Nepal-made boards are just fine. "The earlier ones were pretty bad, but now they have improved," says Rajan Lama, who also runs his own snooker club. The average snooker addict spends between Rs 300-Rs 500, roughly three to four hours, at one sitting, and parlours are usually open at least 12 hours a day. Even the markers who keep the points of each player and are responsible for each board make decent cash. "I make around Rs 400 a day in tips and I also have a monthly salary," says Sona Thapa, a student who works as a marker during the day at Royal Snooker in Kamaladi. People are making money, players are honing their skills, and with the increasing professionalisation of the sport, snooker, like basketball, seems set to stay in Nepal. The BSPAN recently took four players to Bangladesh to participate in a tournament. The association plans to send at least one competitor to the Asian Snooker Tournament in June in Pakistan, and also organise a SAARC-level championship here next month. "Right now we cannot expect much from our players when we take them abroad, but it will give them some exposure and help them in the game," says Bajracharya of BSPAN. ♦

## ANFA GOOFS AGAIN

If there was anyone who could take Nepal's beloved football to a higher plane, it was Coach Stephen Constantine—the national football team's remarkable improvement is proof. Nepali football seemed finally to be going somewhere and now we're back to ground zero. Constantine has resigned from his position as Nepal's national coach. The shameful controversy surrounding the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA), fueled by an inefficient and, by some accounts, corrupt National Sports Council (NSC), has the English coach so disgusted and unsure of being allowed to do any good, that he quit last weekend. Says Constantine: "I've been waiting for several months for ANFA to resolve the crisis but people seem more worried about their personal benefit than about the game." The controversy lost Nepal the chance to host the World Cup Group 6 preliminary matches. Instead, they're being played in Iran and Kazakhstan. It also looks as if Nepal might not even get to play, being coach-less and subjected to the relentless pull and push of the Geeta Rana-Ganesh Thapa dispute. Where Nepali football will go is anyone's guess, but few people are betting on the future. Football enthusiasts will miss the coach, and doubtless many are thinking: Shame on you, ANFA.

(Follow the trajectory of the scandals, mismanagement and allegations: see #13, 19, 26 and 32 for ANFA-related information, #25 for the state of the NSC, and #29 for a profile of Stephen Constantine.)



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# Asan's Annapurna

The old trade route from Tibet to India cuts diagonally through Kathmandu. More truthfully, Kathmandu grew about the trade route now called Asan. At one end is a tank, many elephants deep, constructed by a king. At the other is the glorious complex of the old royal palace, teeming with history, temples and statuary. Every here and there the narrow street, if it can be called such, widens into a square dominated by temples. One

Perhaps in acknowledgement of the goddess of plenty the government sets up a supply shop in time of kerosene shortage almost under the golden roofs.

of the most beautiful temples is the one dedicated to Annapurna.

At first sight, particularly if the sun is right, the temple appears to be made from solid gold. Its three pagoda roofs are heavily gilded, as are its finial, its richly fashioned doorway, the decorative birds, the

metal frills, the divine faces on the ribbed roofs and the ornate torana over the door. Obviously, much expense and devoted labour was lavished on its construction. Instead of an image, there is a silver *purnakalash*, wound around by a silver serpent and draped with a silver scarf. Gilded lions guard the entrance.

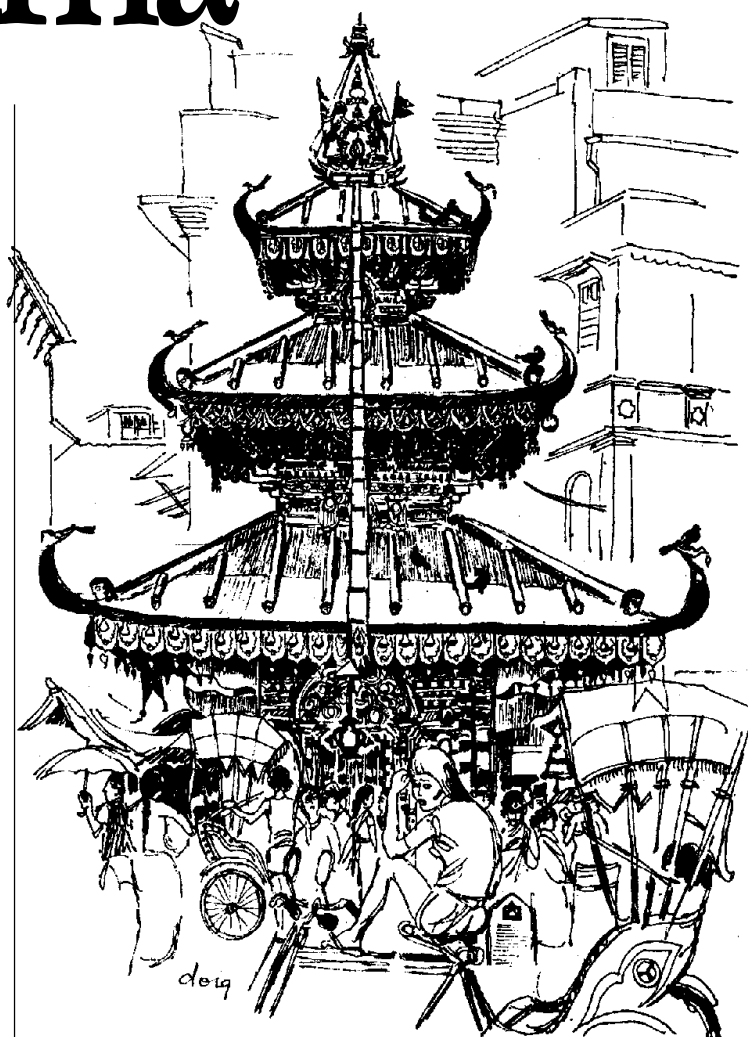
Temple records are dated 1839 and show that the building required renovation by the end of the nineteenth century. Here tradition takes over. Known as Asan Maju Ajima, the grandmother goddess of Asan, Annapurna is the goddess of plenty. Once dwelling in either Benares or Calcutta, she grew restless for the mountains and begged to be brought to Kathmandu. There she was installed under a tree, the stump of which can still be seen in the temple. She faces west and perhaps in those distant, uncrowded times no buildings or pollution obstructed her view of the magnificent mountains that bear her name.

Many years ago in Calcutta I sketched an ancient temple to Annapurna, daughter of the

Himalaya, which stood crumbling beside the Diamond Harbour Road. If I remember rightly, the property belonged to the Roy Choudhury family of Barisa. Mr Pratap Roy Choudhury spoke of the times when much of what is now Calcutta belonged to his ancestors. They had leased the villages of Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kalikata to Job Charnock and had helped to build the Kalighat temple.

There was no image in the picturesque ruin of the temple. A banyan tree grew luxuriantly out of the pillared building, holding it together rather than destroying it. Could this have been where Asan's goddess Annapurna once dwelt and longed for the hills? A pleasing thought even if unsubstantiated by fact.

Today, Asan is a bustling square clamorous with people, street vendors, rickshaws, cars that can hardly budge, cows and even the occasional elephant. Devotees pause before Annapurna or perambulate around the temple, making offerings and receiving *prasad* in return. Perhaps in acknowledgement of the goddess of plenty the government sets up a supply shop in time of kerosene

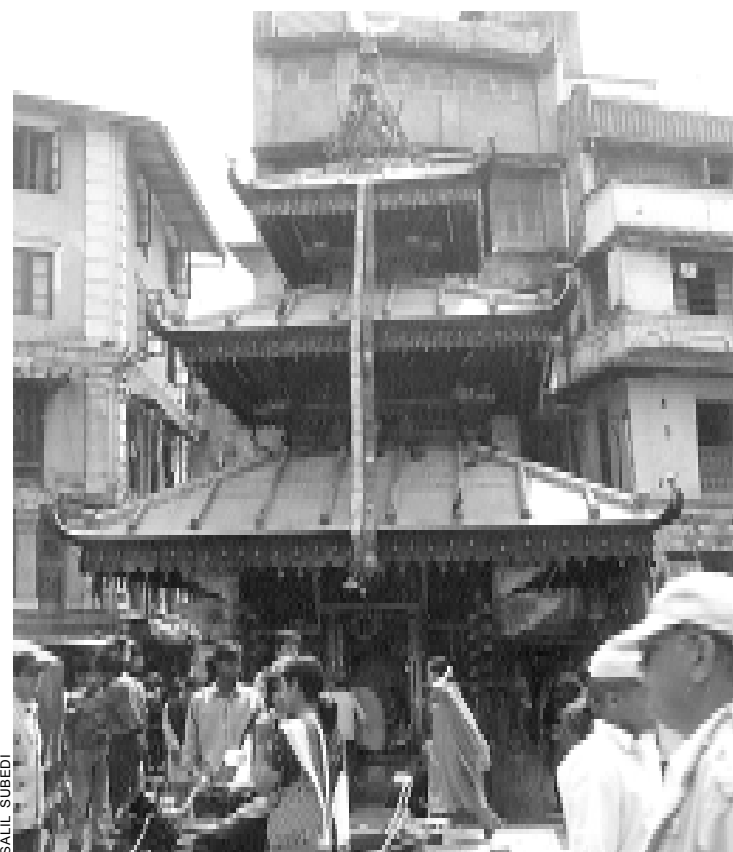


shortage almost under the golden roofs. People carrying tins and plastic containers queue snake-like about the temple. Close by are shops selling Nepali candles that ease periodic power cuts.

Modern houses of no particular architectural style or beauty crowd behind the gilded temple. The goddess herself gazes across the square to a gilded

Ganesh temple imprisoned in thoughtless electric pylons. Will she grow restless again for freedom? I doubt it. There can be no more fascinating a square anywhere as Asan. Even for a goddess. ♦

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



## NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA



## Manju Kanchuli PERSONAL AND UNIVERSAL SORROW

Manju Kanchuli's poems offer rich and layered readings on men's power, exploitation, abuse, and their corollary—women's thwarted desire. Her work questions

those who position women as prey, but she turns her eye equally to the psychology of the victimiser and to the psychology of the victimised. Kanchuli quotes readily from traditional texts and narratives, but her poems are never weighed down by obscure cultural allusions. Rather, a quiet but clear moral tenor rings through her verse, illuminating a complex expression of anger, outrage, empathy and compassion.

The following poem contains an allusion to Meera, the eternally unfulfilled devotee/lover waiting for the love of Krishna. Yet, it is also a personal expression of one woman's torment. The poem also contains a philosophical turn at the end, turning the unavailable man into a more universal agent of women's sorrow and suffering.

### WHY DID YOU COME TO MEERA'S GLASS?

Had you not looked at her  
she might never have blossomed  
Had you not touched her  
she might not have taken flight  
When she flutters her wings now  
while pecking at  
the few rice grains you toss across the courtyard  
I beg you, don't blame her  
Were there no grains in the basket  
the dove wouldn't enter the trap  
Had you not looked at her  
she might never have blossomed

Newton is right—

Were the soil to emanate no attraction  
the apple wouldn't drop to the ground  
Einstein too is right—  
Were the constellations not to spread their hands  
the planets and speed wouldn't spin on them  
The pundits of logic are also right—  
were there no fire  
there would be no smoke  
the settlement wouldn't be razed  
nor would the horizon be ravaged  
And if, before all this,  
you hadn't stolen in  
and lodged yourself in the pollen of the heart  
she would not have perfumed in ecstasy  
and the scent of her ecstasy  
would not have crossed over the garden wall  
Had you not looked at her  
she might never have blossomed

You're to blame here, understand?  
She'll bring you to this witness box  
and stand you in it  
Had you not come  
she would never have come (suit counter suit)  
And had you not been there  
she would not be (male nature)  
Had you not settled on the flower  
she wouldn't have hatched the egg  
Had you not been a slope  
she wouldn't have ebbed and coursed liquid  
Had you not intoxicated her with your opiate  
she would not have stayed in stupor  
Had you not looked at her  
she might never have blossomed

They're all correct, understand?  
Were the wind not to gust

the leaves wouldn't quake and tremble  
Why did you come to Meera's glass?  
This is her last remaining question  
Meera wouldn't have sipped that potion  
had you not come  
Why did you come unseen  
hidden by a piece of the dark?  
Had you not stolen in  
no one would have seen you  
no one would have launched an inquisition  
Had you not looked at her  
she might never have blossomed  
Had you not touched her  
she might not have taken flight

Why did you manifest as  
the poisoned arrow of sorrow  
and pierce the heart of the prince?  
Siddhartha would never have spent  
a whole age otherwise  
wearing a blindfold of tears  
amid trees and monasteries  
There would be no need to place  
eight types of ointments  
on the wounds of the one who removes arrows  
while chanting nirvana, nirvana  
No need to spend cold and burning nights  
huddled beneath awnings and coverings  
below the open sky  
Why did you come  
to Meera's glass?  
She would not have sipped that potion  
Had you not come—

"Why Did You Come to Meera's Glass?" is in Kanchuli's poetry collection *Mero Jeevan, Mero Jagat*.

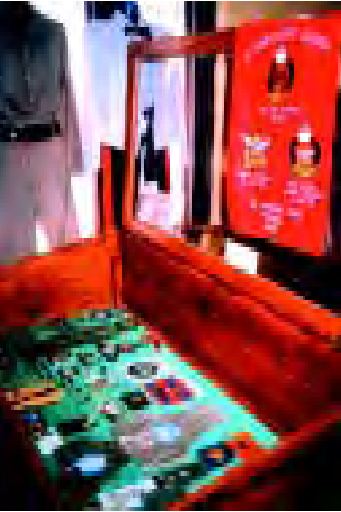








# Gurkha memorabilia



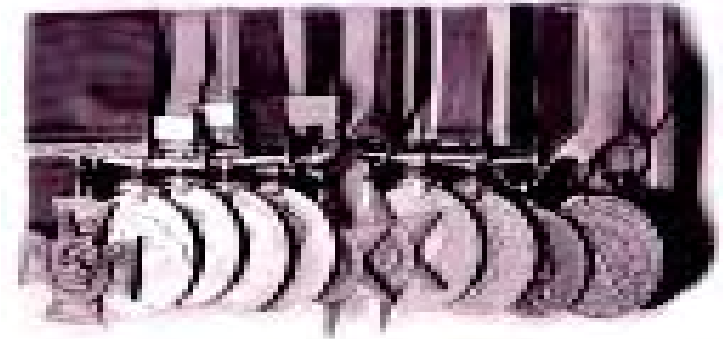
**DIGANT GURUNG** . . . . .  
Gurkhas shot into international prominence after the first and second world wars, but few people outside of Nepal are aware that their alliance with the British Army started a century earlier, during conflicts over the central tarai in 1814-16. The fighting turned out to be a great deal harder than the British had expected, and it gave them a taste of Gurkha fighting skills and bravery. After a particularly fierce engagement

in which General Amar Singh Thapa was defeated, the British commanders offered Amar Singh's men service in their company. Since then the Gurkhas have fought alongside the British Army in most of the major conflicts of the last century in which Britain was involved. The Gurkhas have won 13 Victoria Crosses, the highest decoration for gallantry given by the British (another 13 have been awarded to British officers in the Gurkhas).  
It is a legacy to be proud of and it was rightly so that many current and former Gurkhas felt it was time to begin preserving their heritage. On 5 February 1995, during a reception at Kathmandu's Royal Nepal Academy for seven Gurkha VCawardees—of whom only four are alive today—talk turned to this new reality and it was decided to set up the Gurkha Memorial Trust. "As this is a national asset, the government helped set up the museum by providing Rs 1 million," recalls Captain Yeknarain Gurung, chairman of the museum. The Indian Embassy, the Nepali Army, British Gurkhas Nepal,

Nepal's justly famous Gurkhas are falling in number. They want to preserve their history, but it's an uphill battle.

Grindlays Bank and Lt Col John Cross also donated funds.  
The museum got started all right, but today it remains hidden behind the national table tennis hall in Lainchaur. "We have not been allocated any government land. Since 1995, we've been renting this second floor flat," says Major Yam Bahadur Gurung, vice chairman of the museum committee. A low budget and little publicity mean that few people visit or even know about the museum, which now struggles to stay open. "The annual grant from the government ranges from Rs 100,000 to Rs 400,000, which doesn't cover even basic expenses. So we have to hold fund-raising events," says Captain Yeknarain Gurung. The 2000/2001 budget did not even include the usual grant. If nothing comes through in the next month, it's back to the Birendra International Convention Centre for the third fund-raiser in five years.  
The museum has two small display rooms with memorabilia like medals, uniforms, hats, cap badges and badges from different regiments, all donated by Gurkhas from the British Army, the Singapore Police, the Indian Army, the Assam Rifles and the Royal Nepal Army. The items are in simple display cabinets, with the medals occupying centrestage. There are old journals and diaries written by Gurkhas from all over the world, and the museum even has a small library with regimental magazines and books. Much of the collection provides a sense of the history of the 2nd, 6th, 7th and 10th Gurkha Rifles regiments (disbanded in 1994 to form the Royal Gurkha Rifles), which provided the impetus for the museum. The museum has received three loads of

contributions from the Gurkha Museum in the UK. The curator of that museum, Brigadier Christopher Bullock, is an Honorary Adviser to Nepal's Gurkha Museum, and officials here hope he can help them solicit donations from the Imperial War Museum in Britain.  
Nurturing the collection is a long-term effort, but there really won't be space to display or store new contributions appropriately, not in the flat it occupies at present. The museum committee is on the lookout for a better location—they want to start again, in a way, and build their own space. "We haven't had any success finding a site in Kathmandu, and now we're looking at Pokhara instead," says Major Yambahadur Gurung. "Pokhara is better—there are fewer tourist sites there, so the Gurkha Museum would be a good addition, and could perhaps generate much-needed income."  
Dharan is another possibility. That might be a good move given that there is a better chance of getting government land in Dharan or Pokhara than in over-crowded Kathmandu. For now, Pokhara would make more sense because of the number of tourists visiting. The chairman of the Pokhara Town Development Committee has already applied for permission to allow the project to proceed, and has even allocated land.  
The museum hasn't been designed yet; the consensus seems to be that it should be a simple and tasteful construction in the Nepali style. The museum has been budgeted to cost £500,000 for the first four years, and gradually become sustainable on entrance fees and gift-shop merchandising after that. There is a possibility that the Gurkha memorabilia could be housed in the existing Pokhara Museum, but it is falling apart and is badly maintained. It may not be a bad idea to upgrade the existing facilities



ALL PHOTOS: DIGANT GURUNG

instead of building a new museum from scratch. New parking space, two museum galleries, a souvenir shop, a presentation room, a restaurant, offices and toilets could be added. The plans are heartening, but they're a long way from fruition, given the financial situation of the project. In addition to the fund-raiser in the capital, the organisers plan to stage a Gurkha cultural show in Pokhara mid-year, and also raise funds overseas.  
"We'd welcome serving and retired officers and soldiers to visit the

museum, but visits by plenty of tourists would spread the word about the Gurkhas. If we can find a suitable site, we could generate enough income from entry fees to pay for the running of the museum. Government grants can't be relied upon."  
These plans will probably work out, but it's best to go and check out the museum while it's still in Lainchaur. And if you like it, go to a fundraising event. It can only get better. ♦  
Gurkha Museum, Lainchaur: 422910

## HAPPENINGS



RAPT ATTENTION: Children of Jagat Sundar School watching a day-long musical programme performed by musicians from Asia Society, Japan, on 19 March.



MILLENNIUM SUNRISE: 250 monks held prayers for world peace at the Shechen Monastery in Kathmandu on 20 March on the occasion of the sunrise of the first day of spring 2001.



BIG BUSINESS: Nepal's top Marwari businessmen share podium with Prime Minister Koirala and RPP leader Pashupati SJB Rana on 20 March at the inaurugration of the Nepal Marwari National Conference.

## Sharp



Under My Hat  
by Kunda Dixit

No sooner had we finally proved to the world that we are the most democratic nation on earth by not allowing parliament to function for one whole month, comes word from New Delhi this week that the Indian Lok Sabha has decided to give us strong competition by paralysing its own House. Copycats. Can't they think of anything original? Although we have a head start here, this is not a time to be complacent, we should not underestimate this challenge from the world's biggest functioning anarchy with which we have an open border. We have to be vigilant, and not let our bodyguards down.

Are we or are we not serious about not allowing this country to be governed? The answer I am hoping to hear is "no", and ipso facto we cannot sit idly by and let the Indians steal our modus operandi. We must throw our hats in the ring and doubly redouble our efforts to gird up our lions, roll up

our sleeves, leave not one stone upsidedown to kill two birds in the bush which, as we all know, are worth more than one in the hand. There are those who think a stitch in time saves nine and they are hatching a conspiracy to declare parliament an essential service, to them we can only say: "Look before you leapfrog."

And to stay ahead of the

of the commendable efforts put in by ungovernmental organisations like the Gagangauda branch of Reiyukai Nepal which, according to an RSS report printed in *The Rising Nepal* on 19 March, held the first-ever All-Nepal Jokes Competition this week in Pokhara on the occasion of the 56th Auspicious Birthday of His Majesty the King. Twenty-seven jokers from

candidates, we have some delayed reports trickling in from Pokhara that the winning wisecrack in the chicken category was awarded to: "Q: Why did the chicken cross the road? A: To show his girlfriend he had guts." Nyahahahahahaha. Coming a close second in the revolving door round was: "Q: What happened to the couple who met in a revolving door? A: They

Jokes for all by 2020

**Jokes contest in Pokhara**


all over our landlocked Himalayan kingdom took part in this important event which, RSS reports, was presided over by the Central President of Reiyukai Nepal, who told participants, and I quote: "The 21st Century is the age of Joint Efforts."

But, seriously, even though the news report does not give away the punchline of the winning

competition to be declared the most free-style country in the Himalaya-Hindu Kush region, we must think of new ways to make our vibrant democracy vibrate even more vigorously. And at this juncture, we must take note

NEPALI SOCIETY

# Madal maestro



he popular folk song *Rato Bhale Kyaya Kyaya* may not be a favourite among today's MTV generation in Nepal. And few today might remember that it was performed by musician Arjun Chainpure. A *madal* player and singer, Arjun's rendition of the folk song gave it a new popularity. "We early musicians had dreams. We were motivated to keep alive the folk tradition," says the 40-year old percussionist/singer who earns his livelihood selling musical instruments from his shop in Thamel. "In this age, the *madal*, *sarangi* and the *panchaj baja* don't play too well. They weep," he says.

Arjun Chainpure was born Arjun Shrestha in Chainpur in eastern Nepal. He started playing music at 14, a year after he left home for Kathmandu. "My first *jagir* was at the Sanskritik Sansthan as a *madal* player in 1974," he recalls. "I really had a hard time because I did not know the art of *chakari*," he says about not being able to butter the bosses at the "Cultural Corporation". Chainpure considers himself lucky to be finally doing what he set out to do—play folk music, teach others and tour the world. Chainpure venerates the likes of Ambar Gurung, Gopal Yonzon, Narayan Gopal, Hari Bhakta Katuwal, Bhupi Sherchan and Nagendra Thapa. "But ultimately, I respect every musician who can see beyond greed, jealousy and the ego," he says.

Chainpure is thrilled to play for visitors in his shop who come to marvel at his collection of Nepali percussion instruments, sharing space with the African *djembe*s, sub-continental instruments like the *dholak* and *mridangam*, *damaru*, *sitar*, guitar, didgeridoo, and singing bowls. A fairly large number of tourists take time off during their stay here to take lessons from the *madal* maestro.

You might wonder why he never takes off his shades—we don't know either. There is something he doesn't want to remember concerning his left eye. As with many early Nepali musicians, who made a name for themselves through sheer devotion and sincerity, Chainpure struggled to find his place. "But it all paid off. With effort and the company of my *madal*, I have travelled all over the world.

His album, *Rhythms of Nepal*, instructs one on the intricacies of playing the *madal*, while the forthcoming *Nepali Jharana* is fusion—percussion beats of ethnic instrument from Africa to the high mountains of Nepal. And his parting shot: "I am a rich man because I have many friends. Friendship is my faith, music my soul." All we can add to that is: *Dhintang!* ♦

**For more on Chainpure, visit:** <[www.thamel.com/affiliates/96.htm](http://www.thamel.com/affiliates/96.htm)>

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