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Dwarika's Hotel has bagged yet another prestigious heritage award in recognition of its unique cultural conservation efforts. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and the South Asian Travel and Tourism Exchange (SATHE) presented the award to Ambica Shrestha of Dwarika's in New Delhi this week. In 1980 Dwarika's had bagged the first ever PATA Heritage Award.



## SOMETHING ROTTEN

Something is definitely rotten in the state of Nepal. Our erstwhile warriors of democracy have wasted 12 precious years quibbling about who gets to be on the top bunk, making people more and more disenchanted with this thing called democracy, feeding frustrations on which the Maoists have shrewdly cashed in with some classic grassroots mobilising and periodic senseless slaughter, and with a little bit of help from like-minded friends from the right the Maoists are on the verge of throwing parliamentary democracy into the dustbin of history. That is the story so far.

A year ago, this could have been termed alarmist, but not anymore. The country and people are in danger of regressing by a decade. Meanwhile, even when they are faced with the prospect of systemic erasure, our political parties haven't stopped playing games. There they go, bickering over power which will give them the opportunity to top up their war chests for next year's local elections. After the last bout of blood-letting in Rukumkot and Rumaule, you would have thought they would have learnt their lessons and agreed on some fundamentals. But no, it was too much to expect from these visionless, self-centered ostriches. The Nepali Congress has shown some signs of squirming out of its slumber, but dragged down by a year of lethargy, forward movement is slow. The majority party in Parliament has the stature and moral standing of a toothless lion.

The plot has thickened. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala brought the party into a huddle and announced a Plan. He put it to a cabinet meeting which the Army and Police chiefs also attended, and approved the Integrated Security and Development Plan (ISDP). He then took the whole group over to the royal palace to meet King Birendra. The broad outline about the rules of engagement for this army-supervised hearts-and-minds programme seemed to have been reached. But then a day later in Tokha, the C-in-C backtracks. Now, now, he says, let's not get carried away here. Addressing cadets in this former sanatorium, he lectured Nepal's civilian political bosses on the need for the unity. Without a political consensus, he said, the boys would stay in their barracks. There has been an uproar in the media and Prajwalla Rana says his remarks were exaggerated. You judge: we print choice excerpts of his speech on p. 15.

No one has any illusions: even if it finally gets off the ground, the ISDP is just a band-aid to stop a haemorrhage. And so, here we are back at the fundamental question which is what has given the Maoists such an edge: Which darbar controls the army, Raj or Singha? The Constitution is no help, its framers have left it deliberately vague. The ambivalence also points to a larger clash between the forces of a discredited democratic leadership with a



discredited autocratic leadership. The Maoists are waiting in the hills beyond the Valley rim to take on the victor, as their leadership made clear in Sindhupalchok this week.

Bit of unsolicited advice to the army: the present government may be lousy, but it was elected by the people and it foots your bills. So if the government says go, you go.

To the government and opposition: you fellows have not been able to inspire confidence in the army, which is the institution of last resort. So get to it.

To the Maoist leadership: Do you want to rule over a nation fragmented and ruined by war? If not, this is the time to join the mainstream and convert your bullets into ballots.

## STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# The unbearable sadness of being

The only way to revitalise the blood-soaked earth is to seed it with faith, hope and effort.

The head is heavy. The eyes sting and water. There is a lump in the throat. The heart thuds. Muscles ache. Even nature reflects the deep despair inside. The dismal dryness and power cuts bring on a yearning for rain to wash the gloom. It has been three weeks, but the smoke from the funeral pyres of Rukumkot and Naumule still hangs thick over our conscience.

I had long forgotten the name of the Japanese film, or the context of the snippet that suddenly resonated in a flashback:

"When swords are shining and bullets are flying, the need is even more to read, in order to save the seed." The only way to revitalise the blood-soaked earth is to seed it with faith, hope and effort. The source of all that energy lies in books.

*Domestic Conflict and Crisis of Governability in Nepal*

should help make sense of our present state of ungovernance. In separate chapters, the book delves into what ails our democracy, the shortcomings of our political institutions, and the fatal flaws of our elite. The book then peers at extant and possible conflicts: insurgency, ethnicity, minority politics, economic dependency, resource rights, and geo-political compulsions of an India-locked state.

So, you start reading, hoping for that spark that will illuminate the darkness. But, as with all edited anthologies of this genre, this book too lacks coherence. There is nothing in the windy verbiage of Lok Raj Baral that prepares you for the common sense of Krishna Hachethu. After the racy polemic of Krishna Bhattachan about possible ethnic revolution, the bland reporting of Pancha N Maharjan on the Maoist insurgency is a bit of a let down. The commentary by Kapil Shrestha on minority politics in Nepal doesn't psyche you for the heavy dose of political economy in the wordily-titled "Mahakali Impasse: A Futile Paradigm's Bequested Travails" by Dipak Gyawali and Ajaya Dixit. This is a collection of seminar papers, and it reads like one.

Dhruba Kumar seems to have taken his responsibility as the editor of the volume rather lightly, and opted to pay more attention to writing his own two pieces. But despite its patchiness, the book takes readers back on a roller-coaster ride of our immediate past, and helps us make some sense of the predicament we are now in.

From the contemporary relevance of a collection of commentaries, the journey to the soul of a man who straddled the Nepali political scene like a colossus is like getting down from a rickety bus at the foothills, and then commencing the journey of self-discovery along a lonely trail up the mountains. BP Koirala's *Atmabrittanta* is the first-hand account of an epoch by its defining figure. The roots of many of the political complexities examined in Dhruba Kumar's volume go back to the days when a clash—between traditional values represented by King Mahendra and aspirations of becoming a modern nation spearheaded by BP—resulted in three socially stagnant decades.

It is said that geniuses get along as well

as dynamite gets along with fire. Through his *Atmabrittanta*, BP succeeds exceedingly well in giving a glimpse of how the fire of ambition in King Mahendra courted the dynamite of confidence in BP. The ensuing explosion set off an inferno that smoulders to this day in the ashes of dictatorship and democracy. King Mahendra read poetry and played piano for BP, but had no compunctions in incarcerating him two days after showering him with expensive gifts. The palace is like fire: it seems to be a dangerous friend, and a devastating enemy. Prime ministers play with it at their own peril. Girija Prasad Koirala, please take note.

Then there is India—that all-present reality in Nepali politics. Reading *Atmabrittanta*, you realise why BP could never befriend the all-powerful Indian bureaucracy. While Indian officials, including their ambassadors in Kathmandu, expected to be treated like latter-day viceroys, BP accorded them no more courtesy than his friend Ram Manohar Lohia would render a *babu* in Banaras. This infuriated the self-appointed guardians of democracy at Lainchaur no end, and they decided to ditch the Nepali Congress and hitch the wagons of India's strategic interest to the powerful engine of the royal palace. Introducing *Atmabrittanta* to English readers would be incomplete without mentioning the excellent translation by Kanak Mani Dixit. The prose flows with the easy fluidity of BP's original spoken Nepali transcription.

The third book takes us back two millennia to the Kiratas and Lichhavis who laid the foundation of an urban civilisation that flowered as Newar culture during Kathmandu Valley's Malla period. This book has grown out of Sudarshan Raj Tiwari's doctoral dissertation, but (at least the first half) almost reads like a historical novel. Apparently Tiwari does not suffer from the widely prevalent fallacy among Nepali scholars that intelligibility is damaging for the reputation of academics.

Tiwari's thesis reminds you of what Lewis Mumford, an American planner and social commentator, once suggested: that the history of civilisation could be written in terms of the kinds of containers that given cultures created for themselves—containers for the storage of grain, water, or wine, for the channelling of irrigation water or the control of floods, for the cartage and movement of goods and people, for the containment and shelter of kings and prelates, soldiers and servants, tradesmen and artisans.

One wonders what Dr Babu Ram Bhattarai, the ideologue of the Nepali Maoists would have to say about this book written by his former friend and fellow-architect, planner and teacher. Suffering from edifice complex in the grand tradition of most Nepalis in positions of power, the Maoists too erect gates in honour of their dead comrades.

After that torturous journey over the millennia through three volumes, the realisation suddenly dawns that convulsions of history can't be wished away. Agony is an inevitable part of being, pain an inextricable stage in the process of becoming. One way to reduce the torment is to engage in creative pursuits. Read. It may help save your sanity in these uncertain times. ♦

*Domestic Conflict and the Crisis of Governability in Nepal*  
Edited by Dhruba Kumar  
CNAS 2000, pp323,  
Rs 525

*The Ancient Settlements of the Kathmandu Valley*  
Sudarshan Raj Tiwari  
CNAS, 2001, pp255,  
Rs 300

*BP Koirala's Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections*  
Translated by  
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VIEWPOINT

by GANESH RAJ SHARMA



# "The reasons behind the chronic political instability in Nepal may not be solely internal."

Everyone now agrees that Nepal's current political situation is alarmingly complicated and getting out of hand. What people don't agree on is the cause for this. Some find fault with the constitution, others blame the expensive process of elections, still others argue for the direct election of the prime minister with a fixed tenure, and they blame the current deterioration on the lack of a visionary prime minister.

There are visible and invisible reasons for the current political instability. Nepal has had the basic infrastructure of state, but it seems to be non-performing. Politicians who have been elected at enormous cost to lead the nation seem to have lost their way. They have abandoned the job the people entrusted them with, and they have become like captive agents to further destabilise the country under the machination of an unseen force.

The constitution envisages a prime minister with the powers to provide a democratically strong government. But by an authoritative interpretation, he has been turned into a shuttlecock at the mercy of players of a Machiavellian politics. The result: we have had seven prime ministers in five years. There is a crisis of confidence, and society's value systems are at stake. Confused, the people fail to understand the strength of the sovereignty vested in them by the constitution. Such a situation is dangerous even for big and powerful countries, but for a country like Nepal, which is in the vortex of a new cold war between two of its neighbours, it is even more so. And it is getting difficult to figure out whether the crisis is spontaneous or manipulated.

As a landlocked country between two big military powers, we have lived through an economic blockade, sabotage of various kinds, and terrorism—all designed to bring us within the security arrangement of an advantageously located country. Without declaring war, people are being incited to violence

to overthrow the state. The traditional goodwill between the peoples of Nepal and India is being systematically dismantled by unfounded and mischievous propaganda. Nepal is no match to counter it.

About a month ago, a state minister for home affairs of India informed parliament that arms consignments were being delivered to terrorists in India by Pakistan's secret service through Nepal. Neither the ruling party nor the opposition in Nepal took notice of the matter. This was not the first report of its kind, nor will it be the last. It is not because they have space to fill that this kind of propaganda gets place in the Indian media. It is clear that Nepal has now become the target of Indian propaganda at par with Pakistan. It is logical to infer that by spreading prejudice among the Indian public, it will be easier to implement certain designs against Nepal. Unknowingly, Nepal has been engulfed in a cold war-like situation between its neighbours. Indifference to the crisis may prove to be very costly for us.

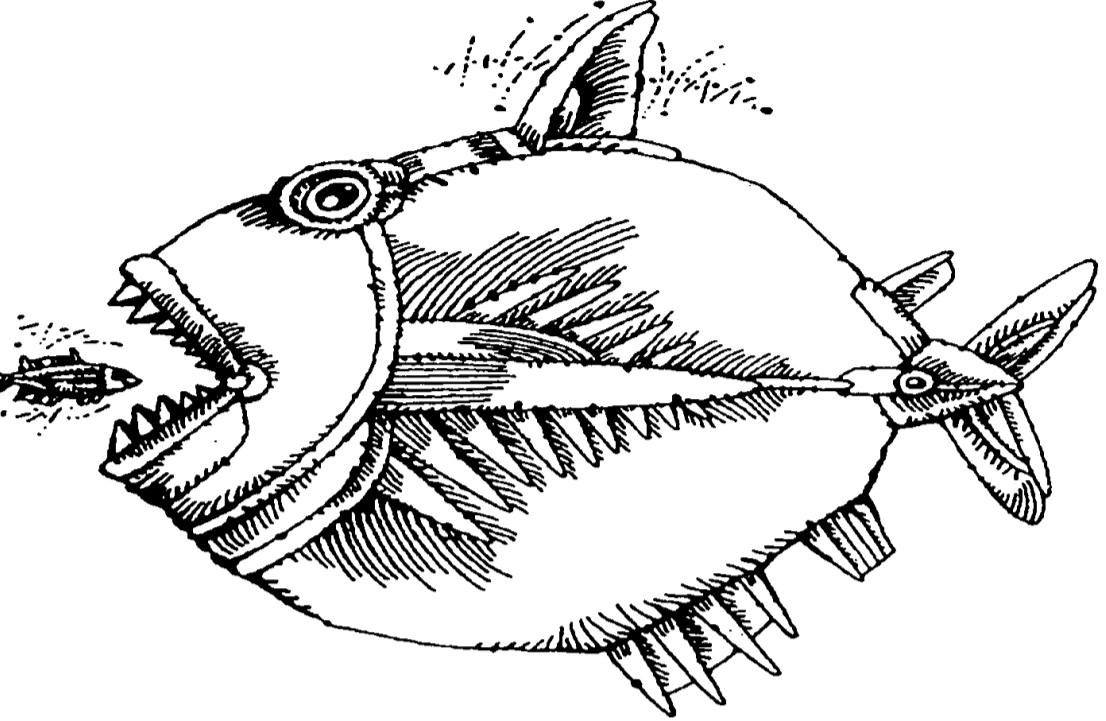
The historical peace which Nepal had enjoyed with both its neighbours vanished soon after China's military control over Tibet in the 1950s. Considering this a threat, India has since tried to involve Nepal under its security system. This is being forced through various overt and covert operations that have gone hand in hand with all-round instability and disorder within Nepal. Several historical documents and memoirs testify that every decision, political change, upheaval and overthrow of the government, have necessarily reflected the conflict between Nepal's two big neighbours. Both India and China have pursued their policy regarding Nepal, not on the consideration of any particular political system, but their national interests. Communism in Nepal may not be to China's

strategic advantage. Similarly, even a self-declared pro-Indian democratic force in Nepal may not be considered by India to be in its security interests. Communists can be a good camouflage for India's covert operations and, pro-Indian

elements or persons of Indian origin may be an useful cover to promote Chinese interests.

For example, China may support the traditional institution of monarchy, but may not necessarily be for the king of Bhutan. Similarly, a democratic India may not give the kind of support it reserves for the king of Bhutan to democratic forces there. Both powers compete against each other keeping their national interests topmost on their minds, and this includes their policy towards Nepal. The reasons behind the chronic political instability in Nepal may not be solely internal.

We have seen through history and in our own region that excessive militarisation hurts democracy. Bigger South Asian countries have inherited armies, intelligence agencies and bureaucracies which were designed for protection of colonial rule. Preserving democracy has never been a part of their ethos. Democracy is preserved when the army, intelligence and bureaucracy remain within the control of a popularly elected civil leadership. India and Pakistan, separated at birth and raised on the animosity of partition, are paying the price of their hostility to each other. Because of its size and strength, India has always been considered a threat to Pakistan's survival. Excessive militarisation due to this threat perception has put Pakistan under chronic military



The traditional goodwill between the peoples of Nepal and India is being systematically dismantled by unfounded and mischievous propaganda. Nepal is no match to counter it.

rule and forced the country to seek close alliance with China.

This triangular rivalry has set off an arms race in the region. India's extraordinary militarisation followed the brief India-China border war in 1962. A country with world's largest number of poor and illiterate people today is the biggest buyer of conventional arms. This has consequences for India's politics. If there is any serious difference between the army and civilian leadership, the decision of the army seems to prevail. Its security perceptions pervade all other considerations, and India's security agencies have the last say.

India has expanded and diversified its secret services to focus on various arenas of a target country. A study by journalist, Salamat Ali, points out that India has about a dozen intelligence agencies active in its neighbouring countries for dirty tricks and information gathering. The three

wings of the military, and each state government have their own spies in neighboring countries who are unknown to each other. Despite covert operations including the Sri Lankan misadventure under Rajiv Gandhi, exporting terrorists and destabilising regimes has not abated, and are an indication that these activities are beyond the reach of a popularly accountable civil leadership.

Soon after becoming prime minister in his present term, Girija Prasad Koirala complained that a foreign power had a hand in making and unmaking governments in Nepal. Even Indira Gandhi once blamed her election defeat on a conspiracy by RAW, and there have been allegations within India that the agency has been misused to settle internal political rivalry. A country with a tradition of democracy in this region is in a serious stage of metamorphosis from a liberal democracy to an

aggressive military power. India is at the crossroads and it carries the fate of this country between its civilian rulers and military strategists. Nepal cannot remain unaffected by this crisis.

Nepal has enough internal problems trying to plant the roots of an alien concept of democracy in adverse socio-economic soil. But our external challenges are much more serious, and may thwart our attempts at development and democracy. If there is no hostile treatment from its nearest neighbour, Nepalis will be able to build democracy brick by brick. If civilians reassert control over India's security apparatus, democracy may have a future in the region. On the other hand, if national security interests prevail and the spooks are allowed to run wild, democracy in the region doesn't stand a chance. ♦

Ganesh Raj Sharma is a senior advocate.

## LETTERS

### GOLFING

Here is a highlight of the Bagh Bazaar Masters Golf Tournament sponsored by the UML. Study this top of the back swing position:

1. Good weight transfer to right side
2. Firm "right shin post"
3. Full 90 degree shoulder turn with hip turn restricted to help build torque
4. High hand position, showing good wide swing arc, and with the club pointed straight down the line
5. Eye on the ball, and ready to strike—with power and precision accuracy
6. PS Note the well-behaved and knowledgeable golfing gallery looking on and reflecting excellent crowd control as a result of good stewarding.

Ican Shanktoo  
Kupondol



### GOVINDA

The story about Govinda (#39) is tragic. The modern criminal justice system (MCJS) gives importance to physical evidence. The Japanese police produced a DNA test report of semen and pubic hair found at the scene of the crime in the District Court. The DNA test report is irrefutable, and was the evidence used to find Govinda guilty. However, as you point out, there is the unanswered question of the two other pieces of hair found at the scene of crime which were not Govinda's. The murdered woman was a sex worker, and she was probably involved with other clients. On that ground alone, the Tokyo District Court should have found the evidence circumstantial, and Govinda given the not guilty verdict.

My concern is not what Japanese justice system did, but how the police investigated the

case. You quote a Japanese lawyer as saying that if Govinda was an American or European, he was have been free to go home. The question begs an answer: why aren't Nepalis treated like Americans and Europeans?

R Sunuwar  
Baneswor

### CK LAL

CK Lal ("In the kingdom of dementia", #38) is turning out to be bigot by mocking at intellectuals who see the Maoist problem as a political one. So, be cautious.

Dev Raj Joshi  
Tikapur, Kailali

CK Lal touches upon a very pertinent point. Not only journalists, but even human rights activists are guilty of sheltering and pampering Maoists. According to their convoluted logic, if policemen kill Maoists in

self-defence, it is an act of gross human rights violation to be condemned with proper show of righteousness. But if the opposite happens, it is either greeted with deafening silence by human rights groups, or merely reported with the convenient journalistic objectivity by the press.

It may be that journalists and human rights groups sincerely believe that the Maoists are championing the popular cause, protecting human rights and liquidating such class enemies as subsistence farmers, peasants and petty cops, and saving poor villagers by killing them. Or, they might have already figured out which side of their future bread is buttered, and thus ingratiating themselves with the Maoist leadership. Else, how to explain their commissar-like behaviour even before the Maoists have succeeded to shoot their way to power?

Heera Shrestha  
by email



ASHESH DANCOI

### CORRECTION

We got several phone calls (including from a person claiming to be the arsonist himself) that the burning government vehicle in the page one picture accompanying the story DEADEND (#39) was in Chhetrapati and not Khichhapokhari. Above, we print another picture in the series of the Maruti being battered before it was set alight. —Ed.

# Babies in the labyrinth

RAMYATA LIMBU

Ever since Tania and Sergio decided to adopt a Nepali child three years ago, the Italian couple has been on an emotional roller coaster. They've joined an adoption association in Italy, been through a thorough screening at home, attended counselling sessions, been subjected to examinations by psychologists, and pursued an extensive paper chase in two continents. "At times it was extremely frustrating and humiliating," says Sergio. A doctor working in an Intensive Care Unit near Milan, Sergio is unable to father children because of a medical condition. "You have psychologists, people who had never adopted a child, putting a microscope to your life. It was very difficult."

All that was forgotten last week, though, when the anxious couple first set eyes on Sunita—the three-year-old girl they are adopting with the help of an Italian adoption association recognised by their government, and Nepal's largest children's non-profit organisation and orphanage, Bal Mandir. "When you first see the baby you forget everything," says Sergio, watching his wife Tania mouth the words "mama" and "papa" to a bashful Sunita on the sunlit grounds of Bal Mandir. "They say children pick up



*Pictures of children already adopted on the Bal Mandir walls*

Foreign parents often battle bureaucracy, corruption and humiliation to adopt Nepali babies.

words in four months and that by six months, they're speaking the language."

Still, the anxiety hasn't ceased. Everyday, Sergio monitors the local papers. He's concerned a change in government might affect Nepal's

adoption regulations—subjecting the couple to another round of uncertainty and heartache.

So far, nearly 1,000 Nepali children have found homes around the world. Since the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare took over, 69 children have been adopted, two-thirds from Bal Mandir. "The families we've met during our monitoring trips abroad are well settled," says Prachanda Pradhan, a member of the Executive Board of Bal Mandir. Adoptive parents are required to pay \$300 as a monitoring fee. Bal Mandir has seven homes or branches around the country with about 400 plus children.

Roughly, the procedure to adopt a Nepali child is this: Orphans or abandoned children are taken in at orphanages after the Chief District Officer's office has looked into their case. If they are not claimed within 21

days of issuing a public notice, the homes can put them up for adoption. Bal Mandir, which has by far the most streamlined operation, requires prospective parents to submit 21 different documents, translated in English and validated. Private adoption is also possible if you deal directly with the child's family. Once processed, the files go through the Central District Officer and from there to the Ministry for Women, Children and Social Welfare where the documents are then reviewed by a five-member adoption committee that includes representatives of the Ministries of Home, Law, and Women, Children and Social Welfare, and the Federation of Child Welfare NGOs.

Having representatives from various ministries on the committee might make it easy to spread the

blame in case of a controversy, but it does result in delay. Viola and Jan Hahn, who adopted a Nepali child actually featured in a documentary *Germany—A Journey to Foreign Parents*, so prospective adoptive parents would be better informed about the process. "Only people with an enormous amount of patience can survive the lengthy process," says Viola, who felt the anxiety and worry she experienced was comparable to a full-term pregnancy. Ellie Skeele, who has adopted two Nepali children, the first through the Home Ministry and the second last year after the authority had been shifted to the Ministry for Women, Children and Social Welfare, says the process has become less painful under the new jurisdiction. "After the initial familiarisation process, they've become systematic and organised. As long as the documents are legal and in order, there's no hassle. Probably some delays," says Uttar Tamata, president of Bal Griha, an orphanage also authorised by the government to put children up for adoption. Since the establishment of the orphanage in 1989, Tamata has become adept at shepherding files around the concerned offices.

Krishna Prasad Sharma Bhandari, joint secretary at the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and coordinator of the five-member adoption committee which gives the final stamp of approval, admits there are problems: "Sometimes it is difficult to get hold of all the committee members as they're with various ministries. Each file has to be screened carefully. Any oversight on the committee's part may result in a summons by the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority," says a candid Bhandari.

Another bottleneck for prospective adoptive parents, is a "guarantee letter" the Nepali government requires. In January 1999, the government suspended approval of all adoptions of Nepali orphans by

foreigners. When it resumed foreign adoptions in March the same year, it imposed new requirements—like the need for a guarantee letter from the adoptive parents' embassy. Observers regard the regulation as a face-saving gesture on the part of Govinda Raj Joshi, then the Home Minister. Joshi, speaking at a public forum on adoption, made it clear he wasn't happy about Nepali children being adopted. "The pronouncement caused a tremor in adoption circles. As an individual Joshi has a right to a private opinion. But he was speaking as an official at a public forum. There were tears, outbursts," recalls Tamata.

Nepal's Civil Code says the concerned authority for adoption can change the criteria as and when it sees fit. While other consular sections accepted a revised edition of the guarantee letter, the British and Americans both submitted alternative wording, outlining the exhaustive screening parents go through in their home countries. "As America is a very litigious society, they probably had more problems with the phrasing of the letter. But it is unusual for the referring country to ask for a guarantee letter after the stringent screening process parents have been through," says Skeele, who is optimistic that the matter will soon be sorted out. Until it is, a US State Department flier strongly advises US citizens to not pursue adoptions in Nepal until further notice. Says a prospective American adoptive parent: "We visited Bal Mandir the summer before last. There are plenty of people who want to adopt kids from Bal Mandir. However, bureaucratic foul ups and pettiness on the part of both the US and Nepali governments has effectively prevented these children from being adopted by Americans."

The procedure is already complicated, and controversial demands like this one make people—particularly those who've had really



*Babies awaiting adoption at Bal Mandir.*

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

## From one Alpha Male to another

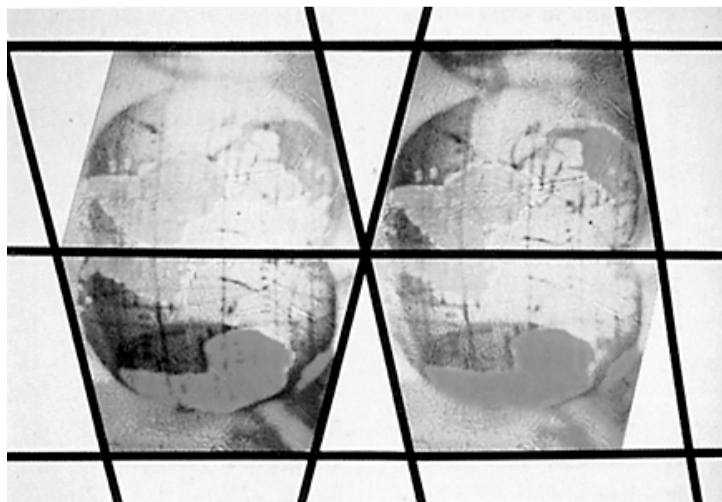
A friend from abroad returned from a trek recently with a smirk on her face. "I met someone who knows you," she said, the smile broadening. I preened, ever the alpha male, and prepared to acknowledge my fame and bask in my visitor's admiration. "But I don't think he liked you much," she said, pricking my egotistical bubble as effectively as any needle.

My friend, as it turned out, was walking along the Kali Gandaki with someone from Kathmandu's aid community. It emerged that she was staying with friends in the capital, and when asked who her hosts were, she gave my name. Apparently, the local aid worker looked as if he'd swallowed something unpleasant, then made one of those obvious and artificial changes in subject. "I don't think he liked what you write about aid," she concluded. Luckily she's a very dear friend, one who is allowed to make fun of me and enjoy my discomfort.

I immediately thought of Oscar Wilde and his line that not being talked about was worse than people saying bad things about you. I also believe this illustrates one of the development world's great weaknesses, especially here in Nepal. A conversation at a party recently confirmed my feelings. I was pressing an official of a big international agency for information, not just on achievements but also failures. And I was asking how much things cost, just generally being a pesky journalist.

"You people," I was told, "you're always so negative, why don't you emphasise some good things about our work." On the one hand, it's a valid point. Success stories should be reported and given as much prominence as disaster. On the other, the development business is—I submit—murky, opaque and oversensitive to criticism. Try mentioning the seminal work by journalist Graham Hancock *Lords of Poverty* around anyone who works for the IMF, the World Bank or a UN agency, and you'll see them wince.

The development business is murky, opaque and oversensitive to criticism.



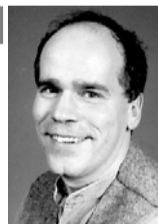
They'll tell you emphatically, and correctly, that things have improved vastly since the late '80s when Hancock uncovered tawdry tales of cynicism, corruption and incompetence in the multilateral agencies.

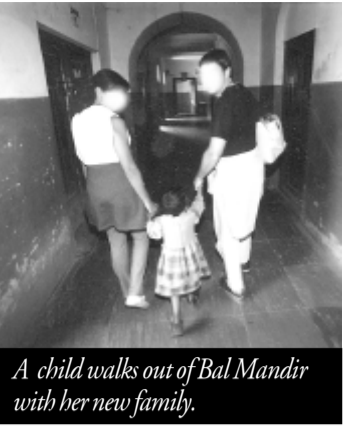
The World Bank, for example, is doing great work in the field of public health, and, thanks to the campaign against the Arun III project in Nepal, steering clear of large dams. The Asian Development Bank is finding ways to fund infrastructure that involve locals and give them services they

need quickly. However, in a country like Nepal, where aid and loans are so crucial to the economy, there is still far too much unaccountability and lack of transparency. Much development money now goes towards encouraging good governance and peoples' awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

But are similar standards applied to the internal activities of the agencies, and more crucially, are local people—and not just their elites—given the right to inspect budgets, assess impacts and choose what they want from foreign-funded development? If overseas agencies encourage local people to hold their elites to account, then they should offer themselves up for similar scrutiny. Too often, those with the money or the expertise call the shots. This is no longer viable. The position of the Maoists on foreign aid and assistance should be a wake up call to anyone working in that sector. It's not just the Nepali government that has to win hearts and minds, and make itself more accountable.

And yes, I agree, we in the media need to follow the same rules too. We need to write and broadcast what people want and what is most useful to them. I suggest that we largely do. If we don't, we go unheard, unwatched, unread. We think about Wilde's words in a lonely place where no one cares about us. I wish I had joined my friend and her colleague from Kathmandu in the Kali Gandaki for that trek. I'm sure I would have learned a lot from listening to the fellow who made the face when my name came up. Equally, I would advise him to take criticism and the input of his clients, the people, seriously. From one Alpha Male to another... ♦





A child walks out of Bal Mandir with her new family.

bad experiences—refuse to speak on record. Unlike many adoptive families, Skeele wants to share her experiences. “I want to see the adoptive process become straightforward, ethical and transparent, to reduce the paperwork and to extend the safety net for children who need families,” says Skeele, who runs *n child*, an email group. Members are families interested in adoption in Nepal, have adopted Nepali children, or are thinking of adopting.

Skeele, a single parent, adopted Mimi privately four years ago when the child was fourteen months old. She adopted her second child, three-year old Tsering, through Bal Griha last year. “To be approved as adoptive parents in the home country you go through hell. It’s a very stringent process,” she says. “It is always more emotional for parents who opt for adoption after trying to have their own kids.” Skeele, who owns and manages a software development company in Nepal, is intent on dispelling misconceptions about foreign families adopting Nepali babies. “Sometimes adoption is misunderstood. Adoptive families are giving a child a home and not taking them to be servants as can often happen when a Nepali family takes in a child. People shouldn’t apply their worldview to us,” says Skeele. “Of course sensational horror stories and the occasional story of molestation haven’t helped.”

Both Mimi and Tsering call Skeele “mummy”. Mimi is in contact with her birth family. “I prefer private adoption—maintaining direct contact with the birth family—because I want my children to know their birth

families. It is in the best interests of the child. Sometimes it is difficult tracing them through a home,” says Skeele as she and Mimi look at pictures of Mimi’s siblings and birth mother. They’re sorting them out for a school project that Mimi has decided to present to her class. Says Skeele: “There are many families who love Nepal, who have a bond with the country and given a choice would rather adopt from Nepal than China, Eastern Europe or Vietnam. Of course it would be ideal if the children were adopted by Nepali parents, but given Nepal’s economic situation and the strong influence of the caste system, I don’t see that happening.”

Skeele probably holds the record for getting her adoption papers finalised in the shortest time in the labyrinthine circle of Nepali bureaucracy where it’s common to sit

on files. “The first adoption, at least the process at the ministry, took five days. People did seek gifts and try to find fault with every detail. But my papers were in perfect order. Everything was clear, legitimate.” She made it clear that Americans didn’t give gifts.

She was lucky, as were the Hahns and Sergio and Tania. Not everyone is, and they most often will not speak out. ♦

# infoom

## Missing the forest?

A row is brewing at the Ministry for Forest and Soil Conservation. Senior ministry officials say that state minster Shiva Kumar Basnet has unjustly accused them of indulging in corruption, essentially involving financial irregularities in the sale and allotment of timber. The accusations are totally false, unfounded and baseless, says Secretary at the ministry Rabi B Bista. Although Basnet did not mention Bista’s name during a recent press conference, he did implicate several high-ranking forestry officials as he read out a fact-finding report. Officials maintain the report is “wrong, wrong and wrong,” and akin to character assassination, and have challenged the minister to find them guilty of felling a single tree. Angry officials also accuse the minister of trying to influence the report.

## Himalayan outbursts

About 100 cycles, 65 rickshaws and activists representing various environmental organisations went through the streets of Kathmandu 19 April calling for a cleaner environment. But their once-a-year sloganeering may not be enough to save the Himalaya and the people of Nepal.

Experts warn that the temperature in the Nepal Himalaya is rising at an alarming rate, heightening the danger that glacial lakes may experience flood outbursts that could devastate entire villages. According to the inventory prepared by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), there are over 7,000 glacial lakes in the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region, 3,000 of which are located in Nepal. What is more alarming is that 26 of these glacial lakes are continuing to grow in size, fuelling the possibilities of outbursts and flooding.

Studies by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology show that the temperature in the mountains is rising at 0.03 degree Celsius per year, meaning there will be a temperature rise of 12 degree Celsius in the Himalaya in the next century. The rate of warming is more than double the global average—anywhere between 1.4 degrees and 5.8 degrees Celsius over the next 100 years—calculated by the United Nations. The rate of temperature rise calculated for the mid-hills and the tarai is 0.03 degree and 0.06 degree Celsius per year, respectively.

## Dangerous study

Superintendent of Police Chuda Bahadur Shrestha ran into trouble when he chose the subject for his doctoral dissertation. For the last two years, SP Shrestha has been working on a thesis that analyses how the “People’s War” waged by the Maoists can be managed by mobilising communities. The police officer, who in the past has won public applause for his work towards curbing the trafficking of women, has already been summoned twice to the headquarters of Nepal’s police force regarding his thesis entitled *Managing Emergency through Community Approach*. And now he fears that the office might unjustly relieve him of his duties.

Shrestha was called up on 30 January and again on 18 April to explain in detail why he chose to conduct research on the Maoist movement, how he would find the time to conduct research without taking a sabbatical from police work that requires officers to be on call around the clock, who is helping him to make contact with the group he is studying, and who is financing his research, among others.

On 20 April, Shrestha filed a writ with the Patan Appellate Court petitioning that his right to remain on the force might be breached by his superiors. A single bench of Judge Bodhari Raj Pande issued a stay order preventing the police HQ from taking departmental action against Shrestha until the court rules on his writ petition.



## Irrigation stalemate

Trouble is brewing between the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB-N) and Nepal’s planners and policy makers over irrigation subsidies. While the Planning Commission has made up its mind to reintroduce subsidies on shallow tube wells (STWs) in an effort to boost agriculture in the tarai, Nepal’s principal foreign lender in the agricultural sector feels granting subsidies without adequate resources will force a fiscal crisis.

The government scrapped subsidy on STWs in 1999/2000—a major precondition of the Second Agricultural Program Loan that it obtained from ADB-N. Contrary to expectations that supply would create its own demand, the installation of STWs shrank drastically after the subsidy revocation. STWs are a major thrust area of the 20-year Agricultural Perspective Plan for achieving rapid irrigation, but less than 20 percent of the target 8,800 shallow tube wells were installed last year. And it looks like this year’s target of 4,300 STWs will also be hard to meet—only 20 wells have been installed as yet.

There is a growing reluctance among farmers to install unsubsidised STWs, because they cost Rs 50,000. A well with 80 percent subsidy costs Rs 10,000.

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Carlsberg

# One party, two systems

**H**ari Roka's diagnosis of what ails Nepal's democracy should open the way to a healthier debate on national politics ("Why is democracy in danger?" #39). I would like to take the liberty of narrowing the focus of the discussions. The failure of the Nepali Congress—the "guardian angel" of Nepali democracy in Roka's glorified words—to spread its wings and its success in monopolising the halo of democratic legitimacy is at the root of the rot.

In all honesty, you have to admit that the founders of the Nepali Congress earned their party's democratic credentials the hard way. In terms of people-oriented vision, the boys in Calcutta and Banaras in the 1940s were way ahead of their times. They realised that in order to usher in democracy in Nepal they would first have to boot out the British colonialists from India. Today many *Kangressis*—living and dead—are recognised as freedom fighters in both countries. (And we always thought only the South Americans, with their Simon Bolivars and Che Guevaras, had a history of regional cooperation in the struggle for national liberation.)

If the Nepali Congress today finds itself the sole custodian of democracy in Nepal, you cannot blame the ruling party alone. The astigmatic vision of our other political parties is no less responsible. Look at the CPN-UML. It has the audacity to assert its democratic credentials without even caring to drop "communist" from its formal name. It's not as if the organisation so badly needs the communism tag. Almost everybody refers to it by the last part of its hyphenated appellation, both in English and Nepali.

Our communists should have long ago emulated the pragmatism of their counterparts in the erstwhile eastern bloc. Once the Euro-communists felt the wind blowing in the other direction, all they had to do was rechristen themselves by dropping the much-maligned C word. In places like Romania, they actually engineered the fall of communism and managed to keep much of their power and privilege intact. At the other end, look at poor Gennady Zyuganov in Russia. His party is still formidable, but he stubbornly refuses to consider renaming it in keeping with the political correctness of the times.

A communist past does not preclude a democratic future. When ex-communist Boris Yeltsin used tanks to silence his parliamentary critics in 1993, there wasn't a murmur of protest from Western capitals. Yeltsin may have climbed up the Marxist-Leninist ladder for decades, but his ultimate destination was the presidency of democratic Russia. How far can you expect elderly pensioners' nostalgia for the Soviet Union to take Zyuganov's communist party?

All this makes you wonder whether Nepal's comrades even deserve to be treated with the democratic respect they demand when they fail to acknowledge that communist internationalism has long given way to capitalism-driven globalisation. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) is not in better situation. First, it is full of the same panchas who were supposed to have been punched out of the political ring by the Jana Andolan. Moreover, how many RPP leaders really believe that they have transformed themselves enough to resist the temptation to



DEEPEENDRA BAIRAGHARYA

For a country that has had decades of bitter experience with multiparty and partyless politics, an evolution to a one-party system might turn out to be just what we need.

vault to the reactionary past, should the occasion arise? In any case, if using "prajatantra" as your middle name were to be accepted as proof of your democratic commitment, the German Democratic Republic wouldn't have been relegated to the history books.

The smaller parties in parliament are either too small or still too wedded to the principles of class struggle—despite their agreeable names—that they cannot be classified as democrats. As for the parties outside parliament, let's wait for the next election to see if they are worthy of notice.

So, is it the end of the road for the non-Congress parties? Certainly not. If you can't beat them, join them—literally. Let all the other

parties merge with the Nepali Congress. I don't think the Congress Central Working Committee would have a problem with that. The party was born in March 1950 of a holy union between the Nepali National Congress and the Nepali Democratic Congress. After the royal take-over of December 1960, the main opposition party in the dissolved parliament, the Gorkha Parishad (which everyone thought was the party of those same Ranis BP Koirala and Co. ousted in the first place) merged with the Nepali Congress.

The ideological complications arising from such a union today would not be too difficult to iron out. After all, the manifestos of all the parties in question are already

mirror images of one another. So what if the UML has extended only critical support to the constitution it had a part in drafting? Once in the Congress fold, our comrades can retain their right to criticise—it comes with the sovereignty they helped vest in the people.

For their part, RPP leaders don't need to be afraid of the consequences of moving from the right to the centre. Two top leaders of the party have already proved their political dexterity by heading governments under the partyless and multiparty systems. Leaders of the smaller parties and alliances, who tend to be more personality conscious, shouldn't have reason to worry either. They can find their own space within the Nepali Congress. It's not just former

prime ministers like Krishna Prasad Bhattarai or Sher Bahadur Deuba who are herding their own flock within the fold. At a lower rung, you can see people like Khum Bahadur Khadka and Govind Raj Joshi busy building their own base. Moreover, if you want to go it alone, people like Ram Chandra Poudel and Shailaja Acharya have managed to thrive on an independent image.

If this scenario sounds too good to be true, then take a close look at the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan. It has been able to prosper for 50 years amid difficult compromises and shady backroom deals. But nobody questions the LDP's commitment to pluralistic principles. In fact, every time there's a leadership contest in the LDP, it looks like the country is in the midst of a general election. You don't have to be a Soviet Union for the party to tower over the system.

The Nepali Congress is an equal-opportunity party. Conservative, liberal, reformist, maverick politicians of every persuasion have an equal chance to pursue a career. And in keeping with the South Asian tradition, one particular surname has a distinct advantage. The good news is that the leadership issue is no longer settled solely on the basis of septuagenarian consensus. For a country that has had decades of bitter experience with multiparty and partyless politics, an evolution to a one-party system might turn out to be just what we need.

To be sure, our western friends and well wishers who retain the exclusive rights to certifying our position on the international pluralism index might initially find it difficult to accept a one-party system as democratic. As long as the party's name is Nepali Congress, however, I don't think Ambassador Ralph Frank or the presiding chairman of the European Union would have objections. ♦



**T**he massacres of police in Rukumkot and Dailekh seem to have sent many in Kathmandu (especially expats) into an uncontrolled tailspin. Even those who earlier used to clearly state that in view of the corruption, nepotism and inefficiency in every corner of government, there was no

## Red star over Mt Everest?

There are two Nepals: the Nepal of glistening mountains and temples and wide-eyed tourists, and the Nepal that has never seen a doctor never known a full stomach.

alternative to the Maoists, are now mumbling about democracy, unconstitutional opposition to a democratically elected prime minister and so forth.

The PM is being described as exuberant and self-confident, although his blast at *Kantipur* while in Biratnagar indicates the contrary. Clearly, the shocking pictorial coverage on TV and in the press of the slain policemen and their grieving wives and relatives gave a brutally human dimension to what has tended to be reported simply as a body count.

The joint statement shortly afterwards of the EU backed by the US, seems to have tilted the opinion of Kathmandu's elite back towards more predictable thoughts and utterances. A Congresswallah who obviously believes the current wisdom that I am a CIA agent told me how

much he and the Congress Party had appreciated US Ambassador Ralph Frank's intervention. He said Frank had helped the Congress Party a lot, and would I be able to help get green cards for his sons who are studying in America. It never ceases to amaze me how so many people interpret history according to their own personal interests, and how few people, until very recently, have any understanding of the roots causes or the ramifications of the "People's War". It was simply too far from most comfortable Kathmandu lives. It was being waged by people whose aspirations elicited little interest or sympathy from the Kathmandu elite.

The other night we watched a documentary film, made for Australian television three years ago, *The Maoist Problem in Nepal*. It gave a balanced view of

the situation then, which is similar to the situation today, except that today it is all over the country. Nevertheless, this three-year-old film shocked intellectuals and politicians. One ex-foreign ministry VIP said: "I had no idea the problem was so serious." If this film had been shown on Nepal Television and as a trailer in local cinema houses three years ago, it might have created the awareness and the clamour for peace which have finally been hearing in Kathmandu over the last few weeks.

The film was shot while the infamous Operation Kilo Sierra II was in full swing, and human rights abuses were at their height. It is an intelligent documentary that tries its best to be impartial. It shows the tragedies endured by ordinary people from both sides, and the audience was shocked at how serious the situation already

was at the time the film was made.

Had the Nepali public participated in spirited media discussions and analyses of the content and points of view, valuable public opinion might have been created for early dialogue to resolve the economic and social problems at the root of the Maoist problem. This columnist had tried to write about the situation so graphically described in the Australian film, and was kicked back to India for her efforts. Gopal Siwakoti Chintan tried to create public awareness of the problems with his Sunday Forum and was thrown in jail for two weeks. We have seen what an effect TV coverage of the recent massacres of young police had on the Nepali public. Children all over Kathmandu saw the piles of dead bodies on prime time television. These days when children misbehave, their parents threaten them with: "We'll send the Maoists after you."

If we are to have peace, understanding and a meaningful dialogue with these young warriors who call themselves Maoist, we first have to demystify, and de-demonise the history of the "People's War". We have to analyse and understand the problems which led idealistic

young teachers and work-hardened farmers to risk their lives and the lives of their family and friends, to take up arms and choose the risky path of revolution. We have to understand the movement's roots, its deviations its justification and compulsions, and the horror, the pain and also the humanity involved in the process of bringing change to the lives of the suffering masses.

This modest Australian documentary, which introduces its subject as "Red Star Over Mount Everest" would even today be worth showing in small clubs and cinemas in Kathmandu. Like recent TV coverage of Rukumkot and Dailekh it would portray human suffering, but of both sides. It would show there are two Nepals: the Nepal of glistening mountains and temples and wide-eyed tourists, and the Nepal that has never seen a doctor never known a full stomach. The Nepal that has never got to drink a glass of clean water. We must keep this other Nepal firmly in mind when we so easily condemn the Maoists. ♦



# Tiny is even more beautiful

**BINOD BHATTARAI**

Future mega-projects that make all headlines: Arun, Chisapani, Pancheswor, or Kosi High Dam. But quietly, away from the media spotlight, villages all over Nepal are lighting up with power from locally-crafted, locally-funded, locally-run micro hydropower. The people, it seems, have got tired of waiting for electricity to come to them, and they are now going to the electricity. They are getting together to get soft loans, even pooling savings, to build micro (below 100 kW) and pico (below 3 kW) hydro power plants.

Nepal's first micro hydro plant was installed about 20 years ago. A gifted and dedicated engineer named Akal Man Nakarmi first managed to couple a generator to a food-processing mill near Malekhu to produce power. Next came his turbine and generator compact, known as the Peltric set. Akal Man's pelton turbine and induction generator combo was an instant hit. Nepal had its first locally fabricated system that was small, tested, and affordable for grassroots communities who could finance, build and operate the system themselves. The modest and soft-spoken Akal Man went on to win the Rolex Award, and today he is still in his workshop in Chhetrapati banging away at yet another Peltric turbine. "This is the future of energy in Nepal," he tells you. "Not another mega project costing a billion dollars."

Alongside Akal Man's successful tests of the prototype Peltric set, came a government decision to subsidise rural electrification through the use of micro hydro. The Agricultural

Very small, locally-made hydro units are lighting up villages. People power seems to be driving micro hydropower.

Development Bank Nepal (ADB/N) that used to provide loans to set up turbine-powered food processors began to include micro hydro in its portfolio. Many traditional *ghattas* (water mills) were upgraded to multi-purpose power units that ground grain more efficiently by day and generated electricity by night.

Fifteen years later, Nepal has an estimated 1,000 micro hydros that use the falling water of small brooks and streams all over the country to produce electricity. And another 900 or so turbines are used for milling only. The micros are not all problem-free—age and disrepair, ownership and management problems have turned some into rusty hulks. Still, a majority are whirring away, bringing the light of development to unlikely remote villages of the country and quite literally empowering people.

And if small was not beautiful enough, many Nepali villages are going for even tinier power plants: pico hydro. These provide electricity to light up 20-60 homes for several hours in the evenings and at dawn. During "off-peak" daytime hours they sell power to recharge car-batteries that villagers use to replace traditional kerosene-wick lamps and to watch satellite television. Pico promoters tell us that the system is catching up so fast in some districts (Ilam is one) that it may not be long before every settlement there has its own local power "utility".

"People have seen bright lights in

neighbouring villages and want to build their own systems," says Bhola Shrestha, of Energy Systems. "Anyone would want to do the same after learning that many villagers use electricity by spending only a little more than what they spend on kerosene or candles."

With over 6,000 major and minor rivers and countless other fast-flowing streams all cascading down at unbelievable gradients, Nepal could be a hydropower superpower. But large power projects are expensive, need large investments and loans, service mainly urban areas, and despite major investments in the past ten years the proportion of Nepalis with access to electricity remains at a low 15 percent. As an alternative source of energy, Nepal's economy and terrain seems to be ideally suited for micro and pico hydro.

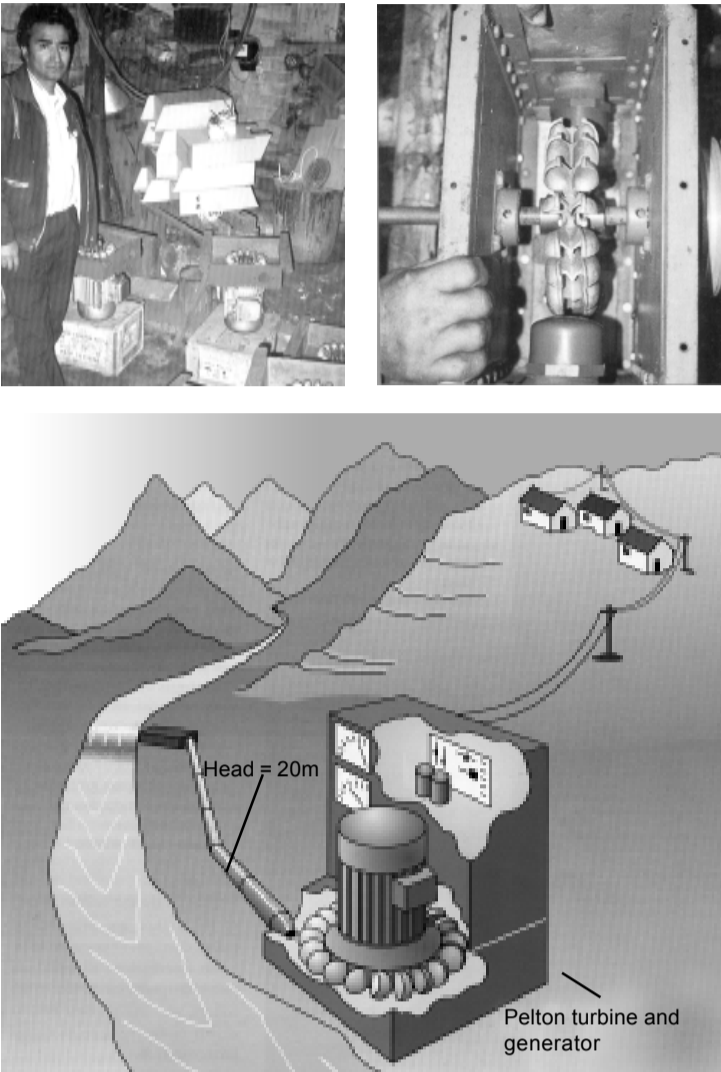
All you need for pico hydro is a water source with about five litres per second of water flow—less than what most irrigation channels in the hills have. (For example, a traditional water mill runs on about 30 litres of water per second). You need to divert this water through a 2.5 in polythene pipe down a drop of at least 20 m into a pelton turbine to produce electric current. The average per kilowatt cost of electricity generated is about Rs 100,000-120,000 and a one kW system can supply to up to 10 households using 100 watts each. There are about 700 such systems now operating in Nepal.

A 1997 study on pico hydros by Subarna Prasad Kapali found that the cost, after subsidies, was between Rs 6,000-15,000 per household. The power producers are co-operatives, individuals and farmer groups who charge flat tariffs based on the electricity used. "Usually villagers pay about Rs 25 a month for a 25 watt lamp, which is what they pay for kerosene for their *tukis*," adds Shrestha. But there are problems slowing the march of the pico: unavailability of start-up capital and inadequate support personnel for repair and maintenance, for example. "Another major issue is the quality of the systems," says Devendra Adhikary, coordinator of the Energy Sector Assistance Programme, funded by the Danish Development Agency (DANIDA). "After 25 years of doing micro hydro we think we need to have certain quality standards in place."

Also isn't it true that pico hydros are good only for lighting, and that they don't have the "economies of scale"? "This is a something that we're also concerned about," admits Bhola Shrestha, whose company Energy Systems. The UK's Trent University is now training Asian pico power manufacturers to address to some of these issues.

Nepali peltrics come in the 0.6-5kW range and the most-popular one kW unit weighs just 35 kg. Pico promoters say the plants are so simple that Nepali villagers have, with some training in peltrics, installed their own systems. In his workshop, Akal Man Nakarmi has Peltrics to suit different situations: low head (20 m), medium (40 m) and high head (200 m). There are now over a dozen local turbine makers in Nepal who are pre-qualified by different agencies to do surveys, manufacture and install micro hydro systems. Akal Man's Kathmandu Metal Industries and the Biratnagar-based Krishna Grill and Engineering Works are the market leaders.

With the Danish Development



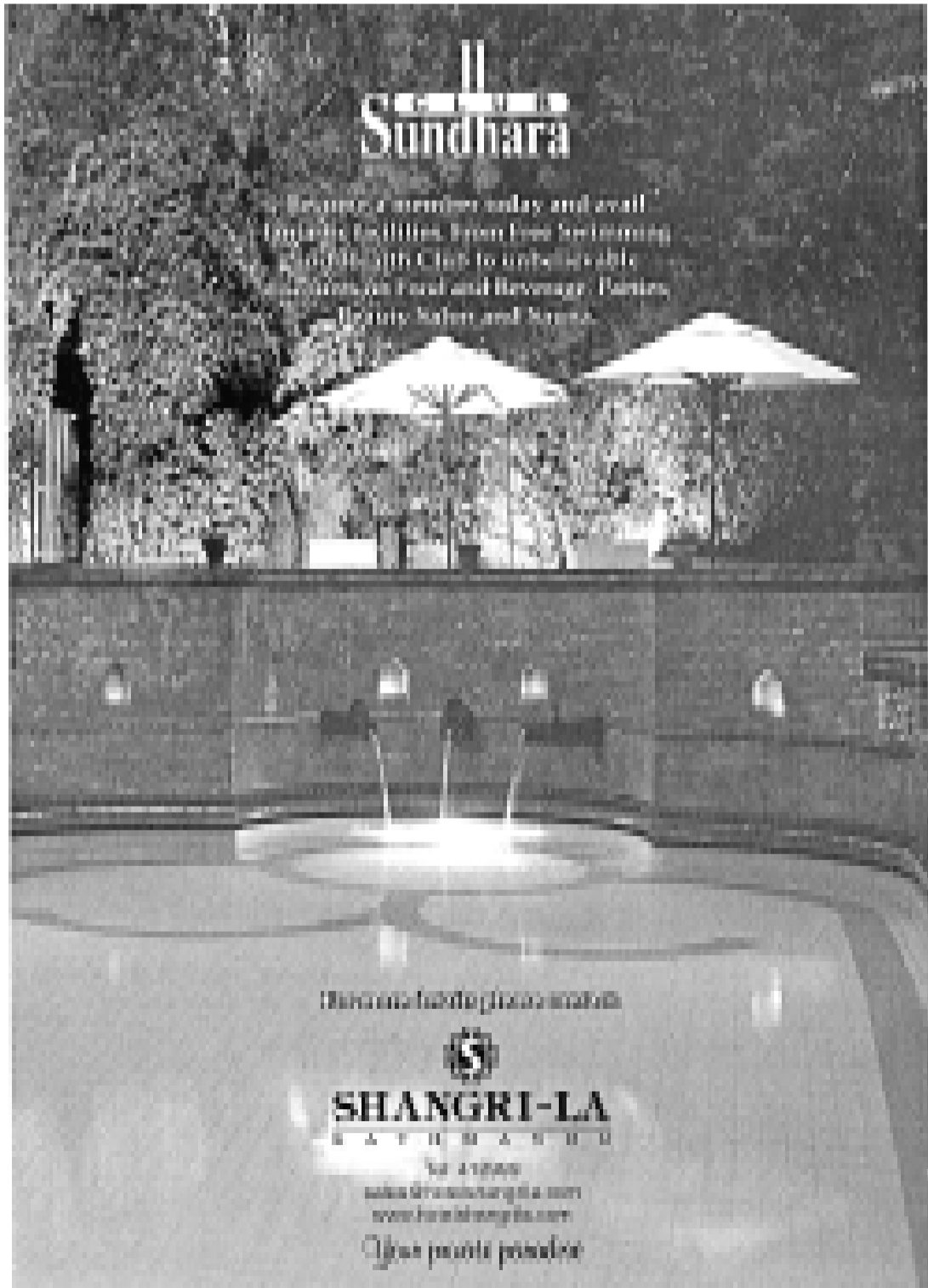
Agency (DANIDA) offering new subsidies, the number of village co-operatives or individuals setting up their own pico hydro units is expected to grow. A subsidy of Rs 55,000 per kW is to be provided to those willing to build micro hydros less than three kW. Projects larger than this and up to 100 kW get Rs 70,000 per kW. There are also subsidies of Rs 27,000 per kW to add-ons for generating electricity from improved *ghattas* or water mills. Besides, there are also subsidies for the transport of electromechanical equipment and construction materials and for rehabilitation of existing systems.

"There has been an overwhelming response to the subsidy, about 300 individuals and groups have applied for support," says Adhikary. As the first step toward quality control, ESAP has managed to get equipment

manufacturers and builders to agree to ensure that the systems deliver the power they are installed to produce and that they are provided one-year warranty. "Within a year we may develop other quality and safety standards," he adds.

The growth of pico hydro in Nepal has been largely a result of private initiative. The initiative hopes to repeat the success of Nepal's vastly successful and sustainable biogas programme by introducing catalytic subsidies.

There are grey areas that pico has to address for its own sustainability. For now, when even major systems are failing to deliver electricity they were supposed to, no one is complaining. Says Bikas Pandey, an expert on micro hydro: "It is small but the beauty of that is that any individual or a group of, say, five people can have a system." ♦



## "I'm satisfied with what has happened"

—Dipendra Purush Dhakal

Dipendra Purush Dhakal is perhaps shortest-serving governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank. But in seven months, Dhakal says, he has done everything possible and is satisfied. We spoke with Dhakal to find out how far he had taken the financial sector reforms, and to get a glimpse of the working of the central bank. Excerpts.

**Economy and financial sector reforms:**  
With about six percent growth, good foreign exchange reserves, low inflation and fairly good revenue collection, our economy is capable of withstanding any short-term shocks—a good time to undertake structural reforms. I approved the Financial Sector Reform Strategy, especially banking sector reforms. We could either introduce reforms or watch the banks die. I would have signed management contracts for both in three months.

**The opposition to reforms:**  
The opposition to reforms seems to have eased. The negative net worth as a percentage of the total assets of the Nepal Bank and the Rastriya Baniya Bank is said to be as high as negative 40 percent. The Asian crisis occurred when that was negative 30 percent. The value of the deposits has deteriorated.

**The Public Accounts Committee decision:**  
They agreed that reforms were needed, but said the process wasn't legal. They said all future actions should be transparent, accountability ensured, and that targets should be quantified.

**New central bank act and independence:**  
First the law was translated into Nepali and finalised after consultation with stakeholders. It was approved by our board, the ministries of finance and law, and was to be tabled in parliament's winter session. It will ensure real autonomy. The government won't issue directives. Shortcomings in foreign exchange regulations are also addressed. There will be limits to the authority of the board and the governor.

**Internal management:**  
The governor's powers have been defined, everything will be decided by the board. There are over 300 contract employees at NRB, hired by previous governors (not Mr Rawal). We decided to select those actually needed through exams on 21 April (that has been postponed indefinitely). We have a system to select staff for career development and a new scheme to allow staff to obtain interest-free loans for further studies.

**Self-evaluation:**  
I am fully satisfied with what I managed to do. I'm not going to seek a decision review because a decision relating to an important official like the central bank governor has to end somewhere.



## BIZ NEWS

## Industry losses

From the initial three-hour daytime power cuts, it is now up to six. We have been told that blackouts could stretch further if it does not rain soon or if the Himalayan snows don't melt fast enough. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) says that while daytime powercuts are inconvenient, they are preferable to load-shedding at night for security reasons.

There was no other option, but what is the fallout? NEA says it has been unable to supply over 600,000 units of electricity, but that on the other hand it has to make "take or pay" payments to Independent Power Producers, whose bills will soar once it begins to rain and their production peaks. On the other extreme, some of NEA's buyers of bulk supply, mainly large industries and mom-and-pop stores and factories, are facing new cash flow problems because of work stoppage caused by power cuts. Losses may add up to billions of rupees.

What kind of losses are we talking about? Here's an example: Between 26 March and 11 April, the Udayapur Cement Factory had to shut down production for 28 hours, leading to losses estimated at Rs 11 million. That means that for every hour without power supply, the factory lost Rs 411,000. The cement factory wrote to the NEA imploring that supply be restored to previous levels to allow it to operate without disruptions. The factory's worries were not limited to lowered production but also over the safety of electronic equipment whose replacements, it said, are not available even in India and China. The NEA has made new arrangements to supply power in industrial districts and areas with industrial clusters from 8am to 5pm, but that will not solve problems facing industries located in cities and using power from the supply for households. The NEA has also asked industries with captive power supply and back-up systems to help it meet the present shortage by running their power supply systems from 6pm to 10pm.

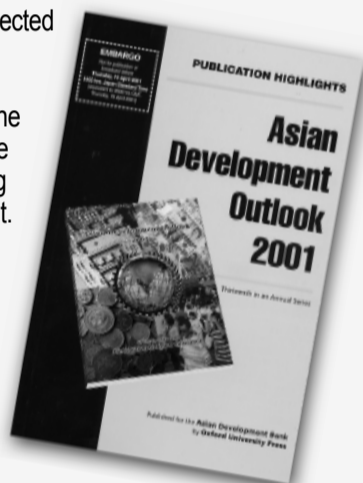
## ADB's outlook

The Asian Development Bank says Nepal's economic growth rate this year could be in the range of 5 to 5.5 percent, lower than the 6.4 percent achieved last year. The forecast hinges on continued growth in agricultural production that grew by 5 percent, due mainly to a favourable monsoon and increased use of fertilisers. The Asian Development Outlook of the ADB also projects continued growth—albeit slow—for Asia as a whole, and faster growth in South Asia (5.8 percent). The ADB expects a slowdown in Nepal's agricultural production and industrial production compared with last year, but maintains there is potential to achieve a five percent growth rate with "appropriate economic policies", especially the reforms that the government has initiated. The bank expects agriculture to grow by four percent and industry by seven to eight percent during 2001.

Inflation, which remained at a low 3.5 percent in 2000, is expected to rise and reach 5.5 percent in 2001. This is because decline in food prices, mainly rice, would be offset by the price of non-food items that would reflect higher fuel costs. The bank also thinks the government's "ambitious" development expenditure and revenue targets in 2001 will be difficult to achieve. Development spending is projected to grow by 45 percent and revenue by just 21 percent. Much of the revenue collection, however, will depend on how effectively the value added tax (VAT) will be enforced, and if the government's recent initiatives—getting the army to man the border posts—to raise customs receipts and increase income tax revenues—will produce results. The shortfall in domestic revenues compared to spending is expected to increase fiscal deficit to 4.5 percent of the GDP, up from the 3.5 percent in 2000.

## Ad war dogfights

The Airline Operators Association of Nepal announced this week that it was suspending the membership of Buddha Airlines for putting out misleading information regarding their flights and services. The action follows a prolonged media campaign by Buddha Airlines that said that their aircraft were the only ones that did not make it to a list of ageing aircraft put out by Flight International in their *Ageing Airliner Census 2000*. The campaign was met with a disclaimer by Necon Airlines, which said their aircraft did not figure in the list either and urged customers not to be "led astray".



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on 29 - 30 April 2001 from 10.00a.m. to 5.00p.m.

The exhibition will include contemporary fiction and poetry and a selection of titles on popular music and films.

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## ECONOMIC SENSE

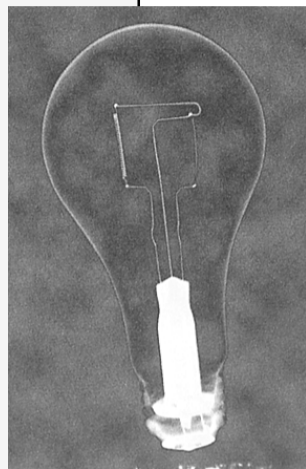
by ARTHA BEED

## Shocking pestilence



The bottom line is consistent, adequate power for consumers charged one of the highest tariffs in South and East Asia.

Every year, when spring is in the air and summer is a mere whiff of the Bagmati away, your columnist takes out the family fans wrapped, jewel-like, in plastic bags with a sinking feeling that there will be no electricity to run the wretched things. Last week I saw a group of twenty-odd tourists returning from the Patan Museum after reading signs that said loudly, clearly and in wonderfully expressive English, "No ELECTRICITY".



It is hard to gauge and quantify the impact of these interminable blackouts, but this Beed suspects we'd be horrified by the scale of damage. Unlike in California, this has been going on for years, and there's little here to justify "You deserve it" looks from Luddites. In fact, given how little we've managed to do to after years of dry season power-cuts, people might be forgiven for thinking we were the Luddites.

Because, you see, the problem of blackouts dates to before the Kulekhani era. There are talks, seminars and conferences galore, but we're nowhere near finding a solution. The nub of the problem is planning—

or lack thereof. Forecasting both demand and supply, and learning the ageless wisdom of the changing seasons, is the first order of business.

The issue is getting into the habit of setting both quantitative and qualitative targets. Here is what we do: look at the total megawatts required, taking into consideration the yearly demand and supply. Here is what we should do: Figure out what the peaks and nadirs of those curves are, and plan around them. We need to get creative with numbers, not just see if the totals add up. Numbers are important, but so is quality.

Power is a consumer item and consumers pay for quality power. There has to be continuous supply of a certain frequency and voltage. If one has to invest in other back-up devices and rely on them for a significant part of the year, what's the point in spending money on a minimum fee and meter rental? The tariff a utility company like the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) charges is based on the assumption that there will be uninterrupted power supply. If the company can't deliver, there should be a penalty. The costs to the consumer from erratic supply and blackouts should be factored into the bills. NEA is proposing a hike in tariffs; while it ought to consider payments to consumers on account of disrupted power supply. Activist consumer

forums must look at this closely.

Businesses only seems to wake up only in times of crisis instead of engaging in constructive efforts at all times to help the government come up with a rational power policy. The cost to the nation due to investments in alternative arrangements for power and the impact on productivity and efficiency is immense—businesses would do well to realise this.

An obvious answer is increasing the efficiency of the NEA. This could be best done by unbundling the utility into separate generation, transmission and distribution units. We keep harping on this, but it needs to be done. Reducing transmission and distribution losses alone can provide a good amount of additional power to combat the dry season shortage.

At the risk of sounding like a repetitive drone, I will say in this case also that we need to work out a long-term strategy. We've seen two big private sector projects up and running—definitely more are required. The time has come to see whether, experimentally at first, to be sure, distribution could not be outsourced to private sector networks. The bottom line is: adequate quality power for consumers charged one of the highest tariffs in South and East Asia. ♦

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

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Royal Nepal's 757 has been grounded for the past two months with its engines bandanged in the airline's bangar in Kathmandu.

The state of Royal Nepal Airlines always indicates the state of the country. And Nepal's condition is reflected in the state of Royal Nepal. At present both are in a sorry state.

Royal Nepal has one of the region's best trained and experienced pilots, engineers and managers. In its nearly 45-year history, the airline has grown from a small domestic airline into an international carrier. And for a brief period in the 1980s Royal Nepal enjoyed a reputation in the region for reliability and courteous in-flight service. Today, staff are demoralised and disgusted with the politicians who have interfered and bled the airline dry. Many we spoke to did not want to be identified, but their anger spilled over. "We're going through the worst times in our history," one employee, with the airline for 30 years now, said. "We would have been a very viable corporation, if only the politicians had not been so greedy and vision-less."

It's not that there wasn't interference and corruption before 1990. Large and murky kickbacks allegedly accompanied the purchase of the 757s in 1987. But it was after democracy that corruption in Royal Nepal also got democratised. For proof, just look at the turnover in top management (see box). There is a new executive chairman or managing director with every change of government. In a country where opportunities for large kickbacks are confined to infrastructure or airline, it is not surprising that successive politicians have treated the airline like a cash cow on jet leases, equipment purchases and maintenance contracts. And when political appointees with vested interests plunder the airline openly, staff right down the line just took the cue.

The real irony is that the airline is going bankrupt at a time when it had paid up on the loans that financed the 757 purchases, and for the first time in a decade it was hoping to earn Rs 12.9 million in 1999-2000. The airline was getting ready for take-off, to expand its fleet with the purchase of a much-needed widebody jet for long-haul destinations and to upgrade the ageing domestic fleet of Twin Otters.

But things did not quite work out

RNAC Chiefs:	
Bobby Bikram Shah	July 1990
Sher Bahadur Pandey	Oct 1991
Bhuvaneshwor Daibagya	Feb 1993
Pradip Raj Pandey	Nov 1993
Kalyan Dev Bhattarai	Feb 1995
Udayabir Gurung	Dec 1995
Pusparaj Raj Karnikar	--
R.R. Shrestha	Apr 1997
Madhav R. Sharma	Jan 1998
Ajit N.S. Thapa	1998
Bharat B. Karki	June 1998
Hongkong Ranamagar	Oct 1998
B.K. Man Singh	1999
Bharat Bahadur Karki	1999
Hari Bhakta Shrestha	Apr 2000
Rajesh Raj Dali	Feb 2000

that way. In late October the corporation's top brass decided to lease its 18<sup>th</sup> aircraft. Royal Nepal Airlines had started being derisively called a "Rent-a-Jet" operator because it has hired every make of jet from just about everybody: Hapag Llyod, Yugoslav Airlines, Turkmenistan Airways, China Southwest, and last but not least, Lauda Air. Every one of the leases has been dogged with controversy over kickbacks: under the table payments to decision-makers calculated on the basis of hours flown. There are few in the ministries since 1994 and in the airline's senior management who are unsullied. Some flight crew in Royal Nepal have become so cynical that they say they don't really care anymore if there is corruption. "If they're going to get kickbacks anyway, then the next best thing is to ensure that they lease jets that are suitable for us, and on terms that would make optimum use of our own 757 pilots," said one frustrated captain.

It was perhaps inevitable that with all the interference from ruling party politicians, a jet lease would sooner or later turn into a political scandal. The Lauda Air deal is theoretically one of the better ones the airline has undertaken. On paper, the 767 would have been ideal if Nepali 757 crew were allowed to fly it. The biggest absurdity is that the airline pushes its narrow-body medium-range 757s on long-haul routes like Kansai and Gatwick, while letting the wide-body 767 do Delhi

and Bangkok. Royal Nepal management privately blame this on crew lobbying: they are reluctant to forego allowances during long layovers in Frankfurt, Dubai and Osaka. Little wonder, then, that even if a Royal Nepal 757 flies full capacity roundtrip Kathmandu-Gatwick and back, the airline still loses money on that sector.

When the Lauda lease was signed, most major travel agencies and hotels in Kathmandu put out large ads in the media congratulating Royal Nepal Airlines for taking the "bold step". Little did they know that the lease would turn sour, and be used by the parliament's powerful Public Accounts Committee under UML graft-buster Subhas Chandra Nemwang to gun for the prime minister's head. The Commission for Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is still investigating the deal, but insiders say there is no real proof of wrongdoing besides a letter from the cabinet allowing the foreign currency advance for the Lauda lease to be released.

Fleet-wise, Royal Nepal has also never been better placed. With three 757s and a 767 it could easily make its flights more reliable and increase frequencies on real money-spinning routes like Delhi, Bombay, Bangkok and Hong Kong. It could take the pragmatic decision to be a hub-and-spoke airline specialising in ferrying passengers from regional airports like Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai and Delhi through code-sharing tie-ups with large international airlines. It

could scrap its over-extended and under-marketed European routes.

Royal Nepal is haemorrhaging Rs 100 million a month just on the Lauda 767. "If we retain both leased aircraft during the low summer season, we'll get deeper into the hole from which we may never emerge," says a senior staffer at Royal Nepal's finance department. But the airline is trapped, it can't cancel the lease agreements without big penalties. Says the official: "I don't think anyone knows how to stop this. I doubt if anyone even wants to."

Royal Nepal has always been a source of slush funds for politicians. Where politicians have remained aloof, their relatives have walked away with the money. Aside from kickbacks, airline sources allege large-scale corruption was involved in the questionable decision to phase out the airline's fully depreciated 727s in the early 1990s. One of the jets was stripped down to the last bolt and sold as scrap. After that the airline had two 757s to service routes flown by four jets. Since then, it has been one hired jet after another for durations varying from 18 months to even 15 days. By now, airline sources say, Royal Nepal has spent \$111 million just in hiring planes. It could have bought two brand new 757s with that money.

After outright purchase, aircraft leasing tops the list as a kickback source, and decisions are taken by politicians. Says a former corporate director of Royal Nepal: "The

commission that comes while leasing aircraft is an easy take for politicians." He told us the going rate varies between US\$100-400 per flight hour. By a rough calculation this means various politicians and bosses at Royal Nepal have pocketed some \$5.2 million in the past seven years in just kickbacks. Politicians are usually hand-in-glove with airline's top managers who are political appointees, airline insiders told us.

The other lucrative place to be is the engineering department. Engine overhaul is the biggest item, each RB-211 engine of a 757 costs \$1.5 million to service after a specified number of flying hours. The planes themselves need to be stripped down and serviced in C-checks and D-checks every couple of years. Spares are bought without transparent bidding. Deals worth millions are finalised by a privileged few, top officials and their political masters. Money is also made in printing airline tickets, purchase of motor vehicles and huge aviation fuel contracts at stopovers abroad. There is even hanky-panky in food and beverages served on board, a lot of the unused liquor after flights just vanishes. It's not all kickbacks, there is also over-invoicing for shoddy products in in-flight catering. A former managing director who dared to fight graft in the airline in 1995 and brought out a White Paper was fired for his effort. A new chief executive was hired who would ensure the cash flow—not of the airline, but of the politicians who put him there.

If this is the state of international routes, the less said of the domestic the better. Tickets sold in black, passengers wait months in remote airports for flights that never come, and RNAC has earned the appellation: Royal Nepal Always Cancelled. Fortunes are made by ground staff in remote airports by under-invoicing cargo, bribes for hard-to-get tickets, and overloading aircraft. The honest staff, and there are quite a few, suffer from a tarnished reputation and pressure from peers to join in the loot. "It's got to the point where if you don't steal, you are not regarded as a team player and they'll have you transferred," one dejected station manager confided to us.

We put this to a current senior executive at the airline. His reply: "Every politician is

aware that this corporation cannot run this way. Our board tells them this can't go on, but they just keep on doing it." The staff unions are polarised between the Congress and the UML and get active only when their political bosses want them to.

Whenever there is talk about privatising the corporation, the same political interests whip up nationalistic sentiments to ensure that it does not happen, lest they lose their cash cow.

Meanwhile, the airline's international market share has plummeted from about 50 percent in 1994 to 34 percent in 1999, despite having larger seat capacity. Royal Nepal has given up nearly all its money-making domestic routes, including the lucrative mountain flights. "All this is happening when we have so many international airlines coming to Nepal, and I don't think they come here because they love Nepal," says Medini Prasad Sharma, Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal. "They come because there is money to be made flying to Kathmandu."

Next time you feel like cursing Royal Nepal. Maybe you shouldn't. Maybe you should curse the politicians and their appointees who have ruined a perfectly good airline and run it to the ground. ♦

<div><div><div>P</div><div>1-30 minutes delayed</div><div>30-60 minutes delayed</div><div>Over 1 hour delayed</div></div></div> On Time			
Flight No.	Sector	Schedule Arrival Time	Actual Departure /Arrival
RA 409	KTM-HKG		0940
RA 410	HKG-KTM	1930	2030
07 MAR, 2001			
RA 205	KTM-DEL		0835
RA 206	DEL-KTM	1230	1305
RA 225	KTM-BLR		1515
<b>RA 226</b>	<b>BLR-KTM</b>	<b>2045</b>	<b>1930 P</b>
RA 231	KTM-DXB		0920
RA 412	SHA-KTM	1815	2000
08 MAR, 2001			
RA 205	KTM-DEL		0900
RA 206	DEL-KTM	1230	1310
RA 217	KTM-DEL		2110
RA 218	DEL-KTM	2045	2350
RA 232	DXB-KTM	1500	1550
<b>RA 201</b>	<b>KTM-BOM</b>		<b>1600 P</b>
<b>RA 202</b>	<b>BOM-KTM</b>	<b>2205</b>	<b>2205 P</b>
RA 409	KTM-HKG		0915
RA 410	HKG-KTM	1930	0005
<b>RA 411</b>	<b>KTM-SHA</b>		<b>2345 P</b>
09 MAR, 2001			
RA 229	KTM-DXB		1000
RA 407	KTM-BKK		1010
RA 408	BKK-KTM	2240	2340
RA 412	SHA-KTM	1815	1915
<b>RA 217</b>	<b>KTM-DEL</b>		<b>1915 P</b>
RA 218	DEL-KTM	2315	0040

pepsi



**ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY** . . .  
nT staffers love massages. Stop  
snickering, now. It's démodé  
to associate massages *only* with  
sleazy back alley storefronts where  
furtive-eyed men go. Today, all sorts

of people undergo a range of massage  
treatments for a variety of reasons—  
from generic stress to that nagging tug  
in your ankle that's been bothering  
you for years. And if you think deep  
tissue massage or using essential oils to

Sceptics and sniggerers, perhaps it's time to take massage therapy  
seriously—it could make you healthier and less of a cynic.

# Go on, massage your ego

heal is silly hippy-dippy nonsense,  
you have another think coming.  
Many biomedical doctors are happy  
to have their patients use  
complementary medicine, as this is  
called—in the US and Europe, they  
work correspondingly with trained  
masseurs to treat people living with  
cancer and AIDS.

But trying on a “holistic” lifestyle  
means more than just nipping over to  
the barber to have your back cracked  
or hanging out at a beauty salon with  
mud on your face. In the world of  
massage, as in life, things have got a

little complicated—you must now be  
specific and find out whether it is  
aromatherapy that draws you or  
reflexology, Shiatsu, Ayurvedic  
massage or the rather interestingly  
painful Swedish version.

Where to begin? Yes, there are  
loads of massage parlours in town,  
especially in Thamel, that offer  
everything from herbal cures to  
hormonal balancing (just how this  
“hormonal balancing” is done is a  
matter of some debate and appears to  
encourage furtiveness). Most of the  
employees in dingy Thamel parlours

are women with just enough ideas to  
make their customer—usually male—  
feel good. The price is right and for as  
little as Rs 600 (and as much as Rs  
2,000) per hour you'll get all you  
want, and sometimes more than you  
asked for. Masseuses and masseurs at  
these places have handled the human  
body for years but, alas, their  
professional training is usually  
inversely proportionate to their  
experience. Chances are, you will feel  
relaxed and rid of aches after one of  
these sessions, but few will ask you  
about your medical and personal  
history or know too much about  
pressure points or connecting  
nerves—not much use for chronic  
ailments like a bad back or  
rheumatism.

If you want a pro, a pro you can  
get. Most work in five-star hotels, but  
their rates are surprisingly  
competitive. The Yak & Yeti Hotel  
for example charges Rs 1,571 for 40  
minutes of Swedish massage or Rs  
2,020 for an hour-long Thai  
massage. A Swedish massage at the  
Soaltee will set you back Rs 674,  
and at the Everest Hotel, even  
less—Rs 561. Not very expensive,  
true, but terribly addictive.

If you're serious about wanting to  
make such treatment a part of your  
life, it's best to find someone like  
Denise Tomecko, a professionally  
trained masseuse from England who  
freelances. Tomecko describes herself  
as more a therapist rather than a  
masseuse, because all the work she  
does is related to purifying the body  
and the soul. She even offers some of  
her more regular clients counselling if  
they want it. Tomecko, who's been  
doing such work for over twenty  
years, started out teaching yoga and  
meditation. She felt that it was just as  
necessary to heal the body and so  
took courses designed by the  
International Therapists Exam  
Council and the British Registrar for  
Complementary Practitioners. She  
wishes others also received  
professional training, so the word  
“massage” is never a source of  
embarrassment or salacious smirks.  
“That's one of the main problems  
in Kathmandu—a lack of  
professionally trained masseurs who  
know their subject.”

Tomecko's favourite methods are  
aromatherapy and reflexology.  
Aromatherapy is the practice of  
using essential oils derived from  
different plants and herbs to  
heal the mind and the body.  
They are volatile substances  
that evaporate easily,  
releasing their aroma, and  
each one has a specific  
quality that has a  
corresponding effect on  
the human body. While  
aromatherapy uses the  
olfactory cells to trigger  
electrical energy sent to  
different parts of the  
body, reflexology is  
based on the principle

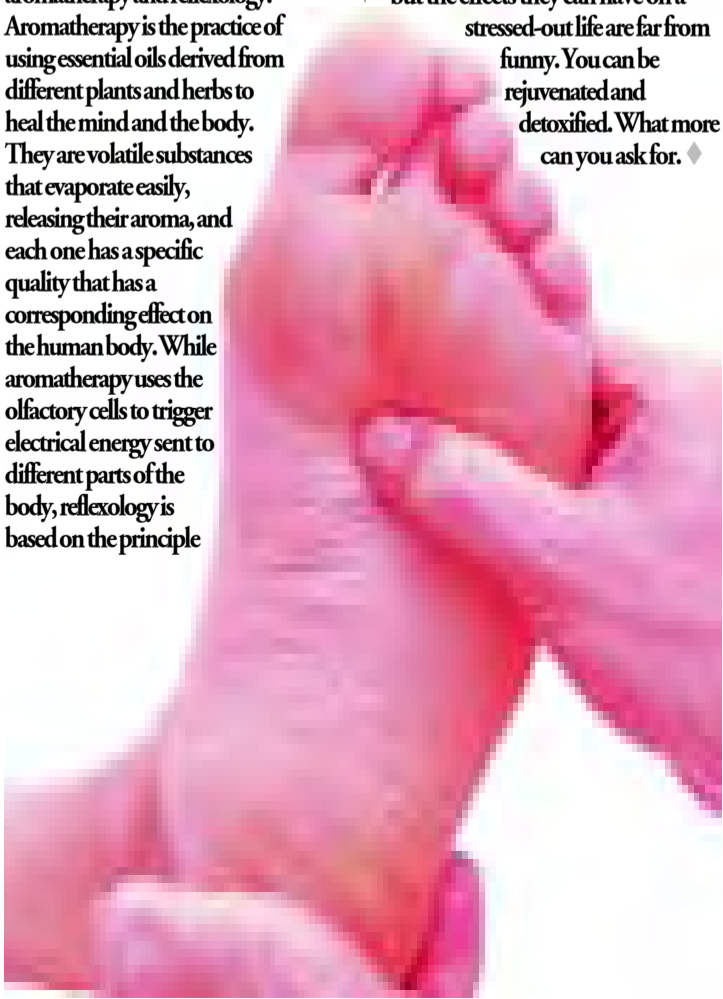
that certain points on the hands, feet  
and ears are directly connected to the  
rest of the organs of the body through  
energy lines. These pressure points or  
“reflex points” when stimulated have a  
corresponding effect on the respective  
internal organ.

Ilse Scheuboeck is another  
reflexologist considering working here.  
A graduate of the Technical  
University in Munich who also  
received pre-med training from  
Munich's Naturopathic School,  
Scheuboeck has been practising the  
science in New York for the last two  
years. She's here because her  
association with reflexology began  
here, in a rather strange manner. She  
was trekking in the mountains about  
ten years ago, and a local woman gave  
her a foot chart used by reflexologists,  
in German. Scheuboeck, then a  
rafting enthusiast was intrigued and  
decided to find a different river, one  
that flowed inside the body. “There  
is no real proof that it really works  
but from my experience clients  
usually end up feeling better after a  
session,” she says.

There's no proof in most holistic  
regimens, but since people do feel  
better, and there's little chance of the  
kind of side-effects that allopathic  
drugs can pose, they're attractive  
propositions. Take the case of Ram  
Brij, an Indian national working at the  
Verge Inn Leisure Club in Tahachal.  
From Gorkahpur, in Uttar Pradesh,  
this former metal welder chanced  
upon Arogya Mandir, a naturotherapy  
centre in Gorakhpur, and was  
hooked. He trained there to be a  
professional healer and eventually  
moved to Mumbai. There Brij Ram  
claims to have worked on everybody  
who's anybody—from cricket star  
Sachin Tendulkar to movie star  
Dharmendra. He's now in  
Kathmandu where he has worked  
with all sorts of patients. He says he's  
even cured a woman after a paralytic  
stroke. “Twice this woman was  
paralysed and both times I cured her,”  
recalls Brij Ram. He's a typical  
holistic healer, in some ways, he has  
not had much formal education, but  
he has had some training. “I believe  
in balancing everything so that one  
neither goes beyond the limit nor is  
left too far behind. If you can bring  
this balance you have a happy life,”  
says Brij Ram.

And that, really, is what massage  
and related complementary therapies  
are all about. Okay, perhaps, they're  
also incessant grist for the joke mill,  
but the effects they can have on a  
stressed-out life are far from  
funny. You can be  
rejuvenated and  
detoxified. What more  
can you ask for. ♦

Carlsberg



# The medium is the message

SUSAN KUROSAWA

and so there I was lying face-down in the sand, being pummelled, prodded and sat upon by an iron-fingered beach boy who, for a grand finale to his super-special-economy-deluxe massage (discount rate for beautiful ladies), ran up and down by spine slapping me with his grimy hand-towel and yelling, “Two tents! Two tents!” all of which was met with much amusement by onlookers who may well have thought he was ordering a couple of circus tents to accommodate the growing

You will emerge smelling like just about anything you can imagine, from a mixed fruit salad to a giant dill pickle.

develop an allergy to a rare Tibetan herb or break out in a rash caused by ground orchid stems. Because these conditions are so irritating and scratchy they can only be remedied, of course, by another hour’s treatment. During all these types of body handling, it’s essential to make the subject feel as vulnerable as possible. This is especially so with

shower cap, nurse’s uniform and plastic raincoat then appears with a watering can. If the mud has been left a mite too long and it’s started to set, she’ll call for a hose. Then you must grip the sides of the slab and hang on for dear life while she holds the mighty rubber serpent and comes at you as if you were on fire. Weeks later, you realise you still have stray bits of mud about your person—navel, ears, underarm creases, unmentionable crevices.

The growth of the massage and aromatherapy business can be easily correlated with the stress of modern lifestyle. We have this ridiculous situation where half of us are doing the jobs of two people while the other half can’t even find a job for one person. That is, unless the under-employed become masseurs and set up shop to cater for the over-employed—a nice full circle of revenge, really. ♦ (Asia Pacific Business Traveller)



On the sandy shores of Goa, freelance beach masseurs offer ayurvedic massages which are bliss of a sort but, depending on the character of the chap involved, could be far more sensual than memsahib would necessarily want.

audience. In fact, he was saying, “Too tense! Too tense!” which is, of course, the mantra of masseurs and masseuses from the beaches of Bali to the sterile salons of Beverly Hills. I have been massaged in many foreign parts. Of the globe, that is. It’s one of the great pleasures of a resort-style holiday to treat yourself to “the works”. Which will variously be described as Royal Spa Treatment, Rejuvenation Theapy, Imperial Massage or, if you are in Chennai, India, in a back street near the Taj Coromandel Hotel, “Mr Chatterjee’s First-Class Fingers by Royal Appointment.” Promises will be made of unlocking the time-misted secrets of eternal youth and finely balanced yin and yang. “Exfoliation” will be uttered as a mystical password, an entrée to the stripping of not just dead skin but years of anxiety, tension and failed fake tans. Ass’s milk, papaya, pulp, avocado oil, honey from queen bees, lotus petals and heady herbs and spices will be involved. You will emerge smelling like just about anything you can imagine, from a mixed fruit salad to a giant dill pickle. If you are very lucky you will not

such semi-tortures as hydrotherapy. Basically, you stand against a tiled wall, stripped starkers, while a person who is not nude but is, in fact, wearing more rubber and plastic than a Tory fetishist, sprays you with the sort of serious hose normally seen on a fire truck. You are splayed against the wall in a most undignified fashion and, if you are a man, your private arrangements may come in for an awful battering. The massage *a la mode* for the new millennium is aromatherapy. This is completely civilised: all those floral scented oils, smoothly applied while you drift off to faraway rainforests to the tune of mating-whale dirges. Things are very different on the beaches of Asia and the spa centres fringing Israel’s Dead Sea. On the sandy shores of Goa, freelance beach masseurs offer ayurvedic massages which are bliss of a sort but, depending on the character of the chap involved, could be far more sensual than memsahib would necessarily want. In a Dead Sea health club, you’ll be lathered with great lobs of viscous mud and left to lie on a stone slab like a marinated piece of meat. A matronly woman in a

tang

# Geek dreams II

## Can you see me?

The videophone is an important milestone in the history of telecommunications, but the challenge has long been to make a personal system that is cheap enough to tempt those early converts who drive widespread technological change. At the moment, the state-of-the-art model for personal and working purposes is the **Motion Media mm225 videophone**. This little beauty not only lets you speak to your callers you can also watch them do all those other things they do while talking on the phone—or, rather, it does if they have the same \$1700 device as you do. Failing that, or until others catch up with you at the forefront of technological innovation, this videophone is hardly a white elephant. If connected to an ISDN line, it can be used to watch television programmes, films and sporting events, wherever you happen to be in the world.



Part II of an occasional NT series on gadgets and gizmos, for techies and lubbites alike.

## Night time is the right time

If you want night vision goggles (and frankly it is becoming increasingly difficult to think of a legal reason why you might), then you want the best. ITT Industries has supplied more than 70 percent of current US military stock and also provides the light-amplifying device of choice to the US police forces. Its **NightQuest 260** is matchless when it comes to tracking wildlife—as it should be, at \$2,700. It uses light amplification rather than thermal technology and claims to boost vision on nights with just a sliver of moonlight from 50 yards of visibility to 850 yards—albeit bathed in an eerie greenish glow. But be warned—you'll need an export licence to comply with an international traffic in US arms regulation. Which, of course, only makes it more appealing.



## Lights! Camera! Action!

Casio will give a whole new meaning to the word “watch” when it launches **the next generation of wrist technology** in July. The device includes a digital camera, allowing the wearer to store up to 100 images, display them on its 20mm x 20mm screen, or download them onto PC by infrared. Enough already? In just a decade, adds Casio, we'll be wearing simultaneous conference and fingerprint recognition watches for security control. Oh, and for telling the time. \$260 only.



## Fast talker

The shape of phones to come might just look like the new **Trium Mondo**, released across Europe earlier this year. Actually a lightweight combination of mobile phone and Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), the Mondo weighs just 200g and offers 200 hours stand-by and up to three hours talking courtesy of a rechargeable lithium battery. The PDA uses the familiar Windows CE operating system and offers a watch and alarm clock as well as calculator, currency converter and three address books. The phone has a T9 directory for the fast composing of SMS messages and is pre-set for the upcoming GPRS technology.

GPRS is this year's incomprehensible acronym from the mobile communications world. It is a non-voice service which enables information transfer up to 10 times faster than previously available on GSM (three times as quick as a standard land-line connection). The data is transmitted in separate “packets” and reassembled at the other end.

Internet users will benefit from instant connections (no dial-up is necessary), giving the impression of always being connected. Users will require both a network and a device that supports GPRS (not ordinary GSM phones). The price depends on the contract and the supplier.



## (and now for something completely different....) Eye in the sky



Before remote planes become the norm, tiny spy ships are likely to lead the way in unmanned surveillance. The latest prototype measures just 15 cm across and weighs less than 60 g. The **Black Widow** surveillance device still manages a sprightly 70 kmph and has a flying time of around 15 minutes. Built by the Californian contractor AeroVironment, the disc-shaped micro-air vehicle (MAV) flies with the aid of battery-operated propellers. On board is a video camera weighing two gm. Controlled by remote,

developers are close to devising a way for MAVs to operate autonomously. They also plan to fit them with navigation systems or sensors to sniff out radioactive materials, body heat or biological weapons. Price on demand.



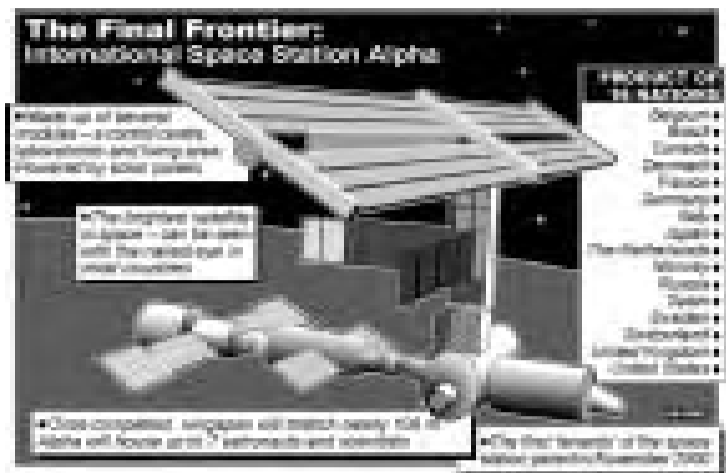
# Up in space, it's different

**GEOFFREY H LINDOP** IN LONDON

In the 1960s Arthur C Clarke penned the script *2001: A Space Odyssey*, then the definitive science fiction movie. He envisaged that humans would venture on a manned space flight to Jupiter in 2001, using a giant cartwheel-shaped space station as a base camp.

Manned missions to planets are a long way off, but Clarke's vision of an orbiting space station has come true in the form of Alpha—the International Space Station taking shape approximately 375 km above the earth. When completed, it will boast a 108.5 m wingspan and be nearly 90m long. The station, expected to cost \$35 to \$37 billion, will be home to seven astronauts and scientists, who will work and live in an area roughly equal to the passenger cabins of two 747 jetliners. It draws upon the resources and expertise of 16 countries, including the USA, Canada, Japan, Russia and 11 nations of the European Space Agency (ESA)—Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Brazil and Italy have also signed on as participants.

The initiative highlights



On the ground friction between former Star Wars foes remains, but up in the International Space Station, cooperation and trust abound.

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international cooperation in space although other advances closer to home expose the limits of collaboration. US plans for a space-based missile defence system have strained relations with Russia, which argues that the plan encourages the militarisation of space. Disagreement surfaced in mid-April when an international conference in Moscow marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

first man in space—cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin—was boycotted by Britain and the US and attracted only marginal European involvement. The conference theme of ‘Space Without Weapons’ was seen as an attack on US plans.

Up in space, however, it's a different story altogether. Here it was felt to be appropriate that the Russians, with all their expertise in

space stations, should launch the Zarya control module, the first component of the International Space Station, which they did in November 1998. A month later, the American Unity module docked with Zarya and the International Space Station was born. Two US space shuttle flights delivered extra equipment to the orbiting platform before the Russian Zvezda service module docked in July 2000, providing living quarters for the crew. Since then, Russia's Progress cargo craft and space shuttle missions have been taking up modules and components to the growing station—including an array of solar panels for power, docking ports, communication gear, computers and other hardware and, in November 2000, the first occupants.

The first changeover in crew took place on 18 March—it was also the first time a Russian cosmonaut was put in charge, with two Americans under his command. Commander Yury Usachev and flight engineers Jim Voss and Susan Helms relieved the station's first tenants, Commander Bill Shepherd, pilot Yuri Gidzenko and flight engineer Sergei Krikalev.

The Americans, who have taken the lead role by virtue of putting more

money into the project than any other country, have since named veteran and rookie crews for missions in the next year. “These assignments signal that the space station is ready for long-term operations,” said Charlie Precourt, chief of the Astronaut Office at the National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA) Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

Free from the confines of gravity, space stations offer the potential to manufacture semi-conductor crystals far larger than those ‘grown’ on the ground—creating ‘super chips’ that enable computers to operate faster and more efficiently than they do now. A weightless environment can also facilitate the manufacture of unique alloys. A space-based factory would allow medicines to be produced without risk of contamination, and manufacture of unique products to help victims of stroke, heart disease and other medical conditions.

The US module Destiny joined the orbiting platform in February, bringing with it a module that includes a laboratory that enables scientists to study the physiological, behavioural and chemical changes in humans induced by space flight.

Other laboratories will follow. The Japanese plan to take up a similar laboratory, Kibo (Japanese for ‘Hope’) in February 2004. The European Space Agency will also introduce a laboratory and provide a number of other facilities on the station. Brazil will provide pallets onto which equipment can be mounted outside the station.

European contributions include three Italian-made Multi-Purpose Logistics Modules (MPLM) which are carried in the shuttle's cargo bay to transport nine tonnes of supplies and equipment to the space station. But although Alpha is called an international space station, not all nations are represented. India has a sophisticated space programme, having successfully launched a new rocket carrying an experimental satellite on 18 April, but manned spaceflight is not priority.

Clarke's prediction of orbiting stations is becoming a reality, but he appears wrong on one point. In his sequel to 2001, Clarke wrote about a frosty relationship between the US and Russia as if they were still in the Cold War. But despite glitches on the earth, the fact that 16 nations—including the ex-Cold War rivals—are working side-by-side on Alpha reflects a reality of mutual trust and cooperation. ♦ (Geminii)

*Geoffrey H Lindop is a British writer specialising in astronomy and space research.*

COMMENT

by VACLAV HAVEL

## Who threatens our identity?



PRAGUE - Identity and sovereignty are often discussed nowadays. But what do they actually mean? Both probably consist of feelings that a community can only be its true self when it can be so without hindrance—in essence, when a community can decide its own fate.

Today's talk about identity and sovereignty is often rather gloomy. Both are allegedly endangered: by an EU that wishes to assimilate “us” as much as possible; by the European Commission with its standards; by NATO, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; by the United Nations; by foreign capital; by Western ideologies; by Eastern mafias; by American influence; by Asian or African immigration; and by god knows what else.

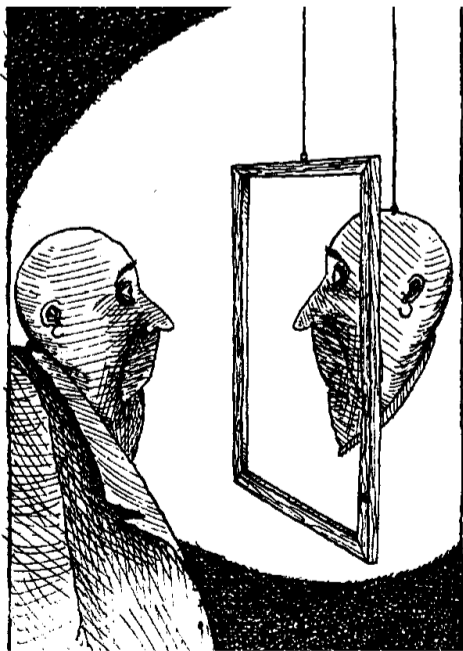
Some of these concerns may contain a rational core. Yet they all derive from a traditional misconception—that upholding character, identity or sovereignty is not principally the task of a community or a people but something left in the control of others. That is, left to those who would attempt to deprive “us” of our identity, or at least to weaken it. I do not think, however, that the world's main concern is to find ways to rob people of their identity and sovereignty. Respect for any nation's unique character, the manner of its development, and the degree to which a community decides its fate, is determined primarily by those living within it.

How is this fate determined? It depends on whether a people close themselves off in hope that the various winds of this world will pass them by, or a nation takes the opposite track and conducts itself as true inhabitants of this planet—as people who assume their share of responsibility for it. All humanity is faced by this crucial dilemma: to silently watch a suicidal self-propulsion of our civilisation, or to become active participants in the maintenance of global public assets, including the most precious—our planet and its biosphere.

But the concept of community is also composed of concrete things. It depends, for example, on whether the environment is nurtured. It depends on whether a people let their cities and towns become marred by a banal universal architecture devoid of creativity and imagination. Such blights are not imposed by the EU or by global capital, or by evil foreigners. All of this physical degradation is accomplished with local consent and active local assistance. In other words: those who defile “our” identity are primarily ourselves—we who should be its protectors and guardians.

Who is it that infests language and conversation with clichés, ill-structured syntax and rote expressions? Who is responsible for the sterile language of commercials seen on every wall and television, indeed, seen everywhere, and without which we appear to be unable to know even the time of day? Aren't these severe attacks on language also assaults on a root of our identities? And aren't we who use them, quite willingly, responsible for them?

Let us go farther: Who allows young people to bathe from morning till



If a nation's identity is jeopardised, it is placed in that position primarily from within by choice, negligence or indolence.

.....

night in blood flowing on television and movie screens, and yet are sanctimonious and astonished about the aggressiveness of the young? Who reads all kinds of trash and porno-trash? These “entertainments” are not filmed and published by bureaucrats from Brussels or by representatives of international institutions, foreign states or large international corporations: they are marketed by citizens to fellow citizens.

Behind these visible assaults on identity, the postcommunist countries confront other serious threats to both sovereignty and identity. Over the past ten years of economic transformation, unimaginable wealth has unaccountably disappeared from banks and companies; billions in taxes go unpaid. Few of those responsible have been brought to justice. Perhaps worst of all, those who transferred money to tax havens seem to enjoy the silent admiration of the people of whom they have taken advantage.

Who emits into our political and public life the poisons of dissension, foul play, egoism, hatred and envy? Who—quite inconspicuously—is leading us to become ever more hardened in our sensibilities and toward becoming increasingly accustomed to the fact that everyone can lie about everything and anything?

I repeat: if a nation's identity is jeopardised, it is placed in that position primarily from within; it is jeopardy by choice—often choices expressed at the ballot box—and out of negligence or indolence. Threats to identity nowadays are primarily not matters of dictates from outside. True, the blind pursuit of profit is not the invention of any one people. True, that pursuit is a trait that is immensely contagious. But it is also true that nobody can force anyone to take that course.

If we really want it, if we all are prepared to express the desire to preserve community and identity by taking part in elections and by making the right choices, an open international environment and the advanced democratic cultures of our neighbours, friends and allies constitutes the best ground for advancing a people's uniqueness. Nowadays, any identity can truly live and flourish only if it breathes the free air of the world; if it defines itself against a background of lasting and living neighbourly relations with other identities; and, if it confronts, in a dignified manner, both the adverse winds that blow across today's world and, perhaps more importantly, the adverse desires that come from within. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

*Vaclav Havel is president of the Czech Republic.*

### More globetrotters

UNITED NATIONS - The UN is projecting a significant rise in tourism worldwide, from about 664 million arrivals in 1999 to an estimated 1.6 billion by 2020. A recent UN study says the sector is now the world's largest industry and the largest sector of international trade in services—and growing. In 1999 alone the number of international tourist arrivals reached 664 million generating about \$455 billion in tourist earnings worldwide. This is far higher than the international reserves of the world's three largest economies last year: Japan with reserves amounting to \$330 billion, China with \$160 billion and the United States with \$55 billion. The study says tourism will continue to grow owing to population growth, improved living standards, improvement and expansion of transportation systems, increasing free time and other factors. For many nations, in particular most small island developing states, but also some bigger and more economically diversified countries, tourism has become the main sector of economic activity. The island states that depend heavily on tourism are mostly in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans. These include Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas and the Maldives, where tourism accounts for over 65 percent, 55 percent and 55 percent of gross national product respectively.

Tourism became a mass phenomenon in the more developed countries by the 1970s, and has now reached wider groups of people in most nations, according to the study. During the 1990s, international arrivals grew at an average annual rate of 4.2 percent, while international tourism receipts, at current prices and excluding international transport costs, had an average annual growth of 7.3 percent. In 1998, 7.9 percent of the worldwide export value of goods and services came from tourism, surpassing such leading industries as automotive products and chemicals. The study also points out that as a result of the rapid expansion of tourism, traditional and emerging tourist destinations are facing increasing pressure from their natural, cultural and socio-economic environments. (IPS)

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# Frontier fracas

**LUKE HARDING** IN NEW DELHI  
India's vast border has always been a source of trouble. In the north of the country, the line of control (LoC) between India and Pakistan in Kashmir has been at the centre of conflict for half a century. Down in the remote north-east, China still contests India's presence in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

But until last week, nobody had paid much attention to India's border with Bangladesh. All this changed last Wednesday when 16 Indian soldiers appear to have ventured just inside Bangladeshi territory near the town of Manakchar in Assam.

They were responding to an incursion two days earlier by Bangladesh's border security force, the Bangladesh Rifles, into Pyrdiwah, a village in the neighbouring state of Meghalaya. What happened next is the subject of bitter controversy. Cut off from their unit, the Indian soldiers appear to have walked straight into a trap.

They were disarmed by hundreds of Bangladeshi villagers who appeared from nowhere and handed over to the Bangladesh Rifles. They were then tortured. Finally they were shot. "The jawans [Indian soldiers] were strangled and their bones broken. Some of the bodies were badly charred and scalded as boiling water was poured on them," General Gurbachan Jagat of India's border security force claimed. On Friday, the mutilated bodies of all 16 men were returned



A Bangladesh Air Force helicopter readies to transport army personnel injured in the border clash.

Last week's killing of 16 Indian soldiers at the border shows the military is prepared to defy its political masters. Could another coup be on the cards?

to the Indian side.

The weekend papers in India made grim reading. In particular, one image shocked: that of a dead Indian soldier being carried on a pole by Bangladeshi villagers across a shallow river. His hands and feet were tied with rope.

On Saturday, the dead man's colleagues watched as all 16 soldiers were cremated on a series of wooden pyres. Nine of them were so badly mutilated they could not be identified. The incident could have been expected to plunge relations between India and Bangladesh into turmoil. In fact, both Delhi and Dhaka have been remarkably restrained in their response—and

have blamed the border skirmish on "local adventurism".

Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh's prime minister, telephoned her Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee to express her "regret" at the deaths. What now seems clear is that Major-General Fazalur Rahman, the chief of the Bangladesh Rifles, deliberately orchestrated the skirmish.

Bangladesh's general election is only two or three months away. The country has been paralysed in recent months by a series of opposition-called strikes. It is little secret that General Rahman is no friend of Sheikh Hasina's.

Like most of the Bangladesh military, Rahman's allegiance

appears to lie with the Bangladesh opposition leader Khaleda Zia, the widow of the former military ruler Ziaur Rahman. Since Sheikh Hasina won office in 1996, the influence of Bangladesh's generals who enjoyed unbridled power during 16 years of martial rule has waned. They have privately opposed her policy of improving relations with India.

Were Sheikh Hasina now to sack Gen Rahman, the opposition could parade him as a patriot who had the guts to stand up to Bangladesh's overweening neighbour, sources in Delhi have suggested. As one Indian newspaper put it: "The military had been quietly preparing the ground for a major showdown using the classical route - India baiting." The BNP [Khaleda Zia's party], and its supporting cast of generals are clearly trying to cash in on the deep divide in the Bangladeshi consciousness over India's designs. The 2001 Bangladesh elections will decide if the play has worked."

The gruesome incident last week shows that Bangladesh's armed forces are prepared to act in defiance of their political masters in Dhaka, a worrying trend. Back in 1975 the army assassinated Sheikh Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujib, the country's independence leader, together with most of his family. A long period of military rule followed. As Bangladesh prepares to go to the polls, following an exceptionally acrimonious pre-election campaign, could another coup be on the cards? ♦ (Guardian)

## No GE for Serendip

COLOMBO - Public health and green groups in Sri Lanka are overjoyed by the government's decision to ban all types of 'genetically-engineered' (GE) foods, starting May. Environmentalists here say that Sri Lanka is the first Asian country to do so and one of the few in the world. The Health Ministry announced mid-April that it was banning the import of all GE foods—it has notified a list of 21 items, which cannot be imported, unless certified not to be genetically engineered.

A ministry spokesman said there would be initial problems in implementing the ban but added that the industry had been given a year to prepare for it. Sri Lanka decided on a ban instead of using GE-free food labelling because it is a major food importer. Wheat and sugar comes from the United States and European nations, and most soya products come from neighbouring India. (IPS)

## Bihar's bloody election

Poll violence in Bihar has even shocked hardened observers this time. In the first two phases of polling for elections to the local bodies, completed last fortnight, 80 people were killed, including two candidates. With three more phases to come, observers feel that even the official death toll would cross the 100 mark, while unofficial estimates expect it to be over 500. When Bihar last had panchayat polls in 1978, 100 lives were lost. This time, given the blatant use of automatic weapons, that figure was achieved much earlier. Polling booths witnessed pitched gunbattles between trigger-happy goons of rival camps, with many voters killed in the crossfire.

The state government, perhaps for the first time in the country, provided insurance cover to all 4,65,849 polling personnel deputed in 1,16,028 booths. The three-tier panchayat elections in the state are to be held in six phases for 8,452 panchayats, with 436,000 candidates in the fray. The only silver lining was the high turnout of women voters, and despite the violence, the high, around 60 percent total polling. About 50 per cent women cast their votes—a record of sorts for Bihar.

Interestingly, because of the Royal Nepal Army's presence along the border there has been hardly any spillover of the violence into our side. And the publicity industry—loudspeaker rentals, printing presses and artists—on the Nepali side, has reported good business.

# Japan votes for change



Junichiro Koizumi

Prime Minister elect Koizumi cuts an unusually colourful figure in the grey world of Japanese politics.

**JONATHAN WATTS** IN TOKYO

Junichiro Koizumi, a reformer promising tough love for Japan, is to be the next prime minister after a surprise victory in voting for the leadership of the conservative ruling party. Defying all predictions, the former health minister rode a wave of popular support to overwhelm the traditionally powerful factional interests represented by his three rivals for the presidency of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Guaranteed the post of prime minister by the ruling coalition's majority in parliament, he is to inaugurate a cabinet that is expected to be the youngest and most reform-minded that Japan has seen in decades. He has also pledged to push aggressive reforms of the banking system, cap the issuance of government bonds and break up LDP factions.

Koizumi, 59, is an immensely popular politician whose selection is likely to boost the ratings of the LDP in the upper house election in July. In opinion polls, 51 percent of floating voters said they wanted

him as head of the ruling party. "At last we have a real leader," one woman told a local television station. In primaries leading up to yesterday's election, Koizumi swept 123 of the 141 regional votes that were at stake, making it politically impossible for the party's grandees to deny him victory.

In the final count, which included a poll of MPs, he won 293 votes, putting him far ahead of his next closest rival, the former prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, with 155.

"It is unbelievable that I received such huge support," he said after the victory. "It is the individual citizens who moved politics. It is my responsibility to rebuild the party so that we can say with confidence that the LDP will change Japan and move ahead with major reforms," he said.

Koizumi cuts an unusually colourful figure in the grey world of Japanese politics.

Compared to the cheap suits and short-back-and-sides hairstyles that are almost de rigueur among LDP members, Japan's new leader is a sharp dresser with long grey permed hair. A divorcee, who has two sons from a marriage with a woman 14 years his junior, "Jun-chan" as he is nicknamed, lists his hobbies as skiing, movies, Kabuki and singing karaoke. As a well-known fan of an outlandishly dressed pop group, X-Japan, he helped to set up a memorial museum for the band's lead singer, who committed suicide.

His policies, particularly his advocacy of privatising Japan's huge postal savings network, have also earned him the reputation as a political punk inside the LDP: the party gets much of its money and support from the postal lobby. "Jun-chan is a little different from your run-of-the mill politician. He doesn't make decisions based on personal interests. He is a politician who respects theories and logic," said one of the other three leadership candidates, Shizuka Kamei, before dropping out and throwing his support behind Koizumi. "He may prove to be a tough character on the international scene." ♦ (Guardian)

## The Saturday Splash

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# "The bare facts of jet leasing"

Narayan Singh Pun, MP, Nepali Congress  
Saptahik Bimarsa, 20 April

I have already mentioned earlier that I was associated with the aviation industry for more than two decades and therefore I know something about this industry. People already know about my experiences in this industry, in the air while I was flying, my experiences in foreign lands and my varied and multiple experiences with all sorts of different people and different circumstances. Although the Lauda Air issue did not get a proper hearing in the 19<sup>th</sup> sitting of parliament, I had given a lot of thought and made public my thoughts concerning this issue at many places and in many forums. I am very familiar with all aspects of the leasing of planes and all issues that come up in the process. When I was with the Royal Nepal Army, and then later when I worked with a private firm, I got a chance to study the ways in which these deals were done and was at times myself a member of the committees formed to lease planes. It is on this basis, the basis of my experiences in the aviation industry, that I want to lay bare the actual facts concerning the whole Lauda Air issue.

The Royal Nepal Airline Corporation (RNAC) has been functioning for a long time and is a well administered corporation. The RNAC has played a major role in the national economy. It began in 1958 with one Dakota and by 1990 had a fleet of 18 planes, which included four jets. At the present moment it has a total of nine planes. Of these nine planes, only two are jets and they fly international routes only.

Nepal is already established as a tourist destination in the international arena and the number of tourists is rising with the years. Air agreements have already been signed with 31 nations and more than 15 different airlines land in our country. Qatar Airlines flies seven days a week using a wide-bodied jet, Thai Airlines flies a Boeing 777 seven days a week. Singapore Airlines, Transavia, Condor and Gulf Airlines all fly wide-bodied jets to this country and all this shows that Nepal has firmly established itself as a tourist spot on the world map. It can be seen that all these airlines are slowly increasing their flights to our country, while the RNAC, on the other hand, is slowly cutting down on the number of flights it offers because of a scarcity of planes. Actually the RNAC should be increasing its flights but it's doing the opposite as said before, slowly cutting down its number of flights. All this is because there's a major shortage of planes. As a result, while it had a 53 percent share in the international sector in 1995/96 (2052/ 53), this share had dropped to 38 percent by 1999/2000 (2056/57). It is not a good sign for the national flag carrier to steadily lose its market share because of the lack of planes. It is keeping in mind this loss of market share, that the corporation decided to lease planes some time ago. In fact, the process of leasing planes has been on for a long time. The two planes that the RNAC owns fly a total of 35 flights a week in the international sector and they are always seen flying. These two planes fly 12 times a week to Delhi, thrice a week to Bombay, twice a week to Bangalore, four times to Bangkok, twice to Singapore, thrice to Osaka via Shanghai and thrice a week to Frankfurt, London and Paris via Dubai. Since these planes are really busy, a small change in any flight really messes the whole schedule of the airlines. At times when a plane has to go in for a check up, then the RNAC has only one plane to operate and this leads to cancellations, delays and chaos—none of which paints a



Narayan Singh Pun

very good picture of the country or the airlines. This results in time loss and in the loss of revenue. These problems have tarnished the reputation of the airline, which in turn leads to loss of customer confidence, which results in loss of revenue and market share. The airline wants to increase the number of its flights to sectors in which it already operates, and wants to start new flights to Seoul, Riyadh and Lhasa. It has already done a market survey for these sectors and is now marketing its flights in these areas. Experts have already stated that if the RNAC wants its plans to succeed, then it should have at least four wide-bodied jets. The long

term goal and plan of the RNAC is to own at least seven wide-bodied jets, and until such time as it is not capable of buying its own planes, it will continue leasing them, like the one it has just leased from Lauda Air. If the plane that has just been leased flies according to the present schedule, then within 18 months it will generate a profit of Rs 650 million. If it flies direct to Osaka without stopping in Shanghai, then it will generate a profit of Rs 880 million. Statistics show that this jet carries a total of 258 passengers per trip, which translates into an increase of 65,000 passengers or tourists per year. If one tourist spends \$500 during his stay, this means that \$32.5 million dollars will be generated as revenue, which is a big amount. Let us not forget the indirect assistance and help this will provide to the nation and the national exchequer. Twelve organisations that are associated with the tourism industry have understood this aspect of the deal and have therefore welcomed this lease happily and with open arms.

Now if we go into the technicalities of leasing a plane, then let me make it clear, that there are no clear cut rules, laws and regulations, neither with the government nor with the RNAC. From 1994 to 2000, the government has leased 19 times planes of various sizes with different companies—this means 19 agreements have already been signed during these seven years. All these leases were done through direct contract and not through a tender system. After the Chase Air scandal, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) recommended to the government that from that time on, all leases should be done through a tender system. Following this recommendation, the cabinet passed directives to the concerned ministries and agencies. According to international norms, all companies that want to lease out their planes, put all their specifications on the Internet months in advance. Now if any government wants to lease a plane, it can directly go to the different websites and directly finalise a deal with any company that gives it the best offer. Plane owners are not interested in anything that talks of tenders, guarantees and counter-guarantees. It is because of this system, that although the RNAC called for tenders four times within the span of eight months, no one responded. It is only after this that the government decided to directly lease a jet from a private company.

Everyone accuses the government of corruption in this case. They state that a cheaper jet was available, and ask why the government went for an expensive one. Actually in the long run, the Lauda jet turns out to be the cheapest one. A Lauda Air seat costs \$15.06 per hour, the Ansett jet would cost \$16.65 per seat per hour and the China Southwest Airlines plane costs \$15.98 per hour. ♦

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

We're looking at three areas within the Nepali context—parliament, the streets, and the jungle. If the power in parliament has gone to the streets, the power of the streets has gone to the jungle. Our goal is to bring the power that has gone to the jungles back to the streets and parliament. To involve them in the democratic process.

—Madhav Kumar Nepal, CPN (UML) General Secretary in Tarun Weekly, 23 April.



If the army were mobilised, they'd put everyone in place...  
Singha Darbar is immobilised. Maybe we should go there too.

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक Deshantar Weekly, 22 April

## "A futile exercise"

Budhabar Saptahik, 25 April

बुधवार

The government invited the CPN-UML last Saturday to participate in a discussion about the proposed "Integrated Security and Development Plan". The UML declined the invitation, instead putting forth four demands. The UML said that the Programme is futile and cannot help solve the Maoist problem, and refused to hold talks with the government. The four demands were:

- The programme is groundwork for mobilisation of the army. It has been UML's political stand that Maoist problem cannot be solved by the use of force.
- The programme is ambiguous, directionless and dubious. It is not clear even about the nature of the Maoist problem.
- The programme is superficial and reactionary and will provide further opportunities for the Nepali Congress and the government for corruption.
- The present government is

autocratic and undemocratic. It has been using the police to curb the democratic and constitutional rights of the opposition to peaceful demonstration, and to arrest innocent leaders and political activists. There is no guarantee that it would not use the army to destroy democracy and suppress the opposition.

Only a government with political commitment, ethics and high morale can lead the country and give it direction. Koirala's government lacks these qualities. The government itself is synonymous with violation of the constitution and laws and democratic rights, intrigue, unrest and corruption. On what moral grounds can the government expect to rule the country and solve the Maoist problem? A government presided over by a useless and corrupt prime minister cannot solve the nation's problem. The plan is only another ploy of the corrupt.

## Gyanendra meets Prachanda

Nepal Jagaran, 16 April

नेपाल जगरण

It is public knowledge that Babu Ram Bhattarai and Prachanda of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoists) have met many leaders of various political parties. Now it has come out in the open that the two Maoist leaders also met Prince Gyanendra recently.

The meeting between the prince



Prince Gyanendra

and the two Maoists leaders has raised a lot of questions and suspicion in the minds of the people. This is mainly because the basis of that meeting, what was discussed and what conclusions were reached have not been clarified. According to sources this meeting took place very recently. Ramesh Nath Pandey, the royal nominee to the Upper House was also present at the meeting. It has been stated that a very high-ranking army officer was also present. It seems Pandey was the coordinator, the mediator.

"Why did a member of the royal household meet Maoists leaders?" is the question everyone is asking. Both parties agreed to keep the issues discussed at the meeting a secret. This has given rise to more suspicion.

Why are members of the Maoist organisation very keen to meet with members of the royal household? Almost a month ago, members of the Maoist party met with Pandey, who as mentioned earlier is the royal nominee to the Upper House. The meeting of the Maoists and Pandey was criticised by all. Now, after the meeting of Prince Gyanendra and the Maoists, there is more suspicion in the minds of the people.

At present both Prachanda and Bhattarai are in the capital. Rumour has it that they are very busy (meeting different people). Both leaders had earlier met CP Mainali of the Marxist-Leninist party, Prakash Nepal of the Unity Centre and Narayan Man Bijukchhee of the Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party. According to sources, it is expected that the two leaders will soon meet with leaders of the Samyukta Jana Morcha and the Nepal Communist Party (Masal). The

Maoist leaders are meeting with the leaders of all left-leaning parties and others which is why rumours of all sorts are around. People know that the Maoists have met with many leaders, but they do not know what was discussed at the meetings. This lack of information is creating a bigger rift between these forces and the government too.

## What the Chief Sa'ab said...

Excerpts from a convocation speech of the army chief Prajwalla S Rana, 20 April

For the past few years, we at the Royal Nepal Army and the people have begun to understand that the country's security situation has now reached very difficult phase. We realise that the situation is slowly getting worse. The nation has been trapped in violence and counter-violence, the conspiracies and counter-conspiracies, the lack of discipline. Because there has been a deterioration of human values and institutions, extremists, insurgents, communal forces and criminals have found support. As result, there has been a negative affect on national unity and development and, to summarise, the entire country is restless, amid uncertainty, unrest, hopelessness and poverty. Today's main need is to end the confusion, negative behaviour and activities to secure the future of the country. For that reason mainly, all political parties and also we, the citizens, need to take the initiative for national stability, unity and interest.

While the country is going through unrest and confusion, there have been comments on the role of the army and its duties. The rank and file needs to be clear on the Royal Nepal Army's position on these issues. For there to be peace, security and development in the country, it is important to have political stability established. The Royal Nepal Army is not a party-affiliated mechanism but a national institution. This is a non-political institution whose proud history is associated with the history of the making of the Nepali nation, its continuity and national unity. Thus the Royal Nepal Army, which is a



Prajwalla SJB Rana

symbol of national continuity and stability, has to be used only in situations that would benefit the entire country. It is very necessary that areas of national interest be identified...

...finally, to support the national interest, and for peace, security and development programmes, we cannot ignore the fact that the Royal Nepal Army will in the appropriate time and situation be mobilised, for which the Royal Nepal Army is always mentally and physically prepared. It is the duty and responsibility of all to achieve success in the work for which we are mobilised. Thus if the Royal Nepal Army, for national interest, is to be involved in the Internal Security and Development Programme then sustained and continued political commitment of all political parties and the people, has necessarily to be there (apariharya buncha).

# Jamaican, winner and gentleman



Courtney Walsh's brilliant test career comes to an end, in one of the most touching farewells ever in the game.

Courtney Walsh's final moments as a test cricketer will stay with him for the rest of his life. A Jamaican through and through, a winner and a gentleman, he was able to experience and indulge in all three pleasures as he helped West Indies to a 130-run victory over South Africa in the fifth and final test at Sabina Park this week.

When South African last man Paul Adams sliced a delivery from Mervyn Dillon to Marlon Samuels at backward point, the catcher was suddenly all alone. Everyone else was running towards Walsh at fine leg. Dillon, who many in the Caribbean hope will go furthest to filling the

gaping void created by Walsh's departure, leapt into his mentor's embrace and was immediately followed by the third fast bowler in the side, Cameron Cuffy. Brian Lara, meanwhile, had persuaded umpire Steve Bucknor to part with the match ball and sprinted towards Walsh and his ecstatic gathering to present him with the memento as well as a stump he had grabbed when victory was complete.

Walsh was hugged by every one of his team mates and then, left briefly alone, saluted his adoring fans and accepted the embraces of groundstaff, security guards and anyone else who had managed to climb over the

perimeter fences in time. The famous Sabina Park Mound played the moving reggae song composed and written in his honour by local DJ Zum Jay: "Whoa di big man inna cricket" and the crowd joined in, "Whoa lick down batsman wicket..."

As Walsh finally reached the pavilion he was greeted by another guard of honour, team mates and South Africans alike lining up to applaud him as he made his way into the dressing room where he contemplatively sipped champagne straight from the bottle. "I said before the game that I was going to come out and enjoy five days of good cricket and, it's a good team, maybe we could have a win to provide a nice send off for me. The team played unbelievable cricket and I'm just grateful for that," Walsh said after the game.

"When I broke the record (for the most wickets) last year it was a

tremendous occasion, I broke a record, we won the test and it was a series win as well. It was fantastic to finish it all here, on home turf, but that was probably a bit more special," Walsh said when asked about his favourite memory from a career spanning 132 tests in 17 years. Walsh thanked "everyone involved with West Indian cricket, from the very top to the very bottom, but most importantly the fans who have shown tremendous loyalty and stuck by me and supported me through thick and thin."

The cheers were deafening, Walsh noted, too, the "good sportsmanship" of the South Africans who formed a guard of honour when he came out to bat for the last time on the fourth morning and joined in the applause and back-slapping congratulations immediately the match ended. "In my last test series in England they did the same thing and they did it in Australia,



Walsh

too. All the opposition teams I have played against have treated me with the utmost respect and I'm very grateful for that. I just want to thank them for that and wish them well in their endeavours."

"But to my own team mates, who have always given me their support through thick and thin, I want to thank you. You have answered the call for me in this test match...thank

you." As promised before his final match, the 38-year-old Walsh plans to take a complete rest for about six months before deciding where his future lies. "I spoke to Allan Donald and he recommended six months off, put the feet up, play a little golf...I'm going to spend some time with the family at home, some time with my son and daughter. I'm just going to refresh myself, recharge my batteries and then focus on the next stage of my life from here on in." It is a credit to the nature and spirit of the man that no one seemed to be sad as he said goodbye.

Maybe it was because West Indies had won their first test in 14 attempts, but more likely the noise, the vibe and the unrestrained joy pulsating from the party on the Mound was because Jamaicans were simply overflowing with pride that Courtney was one of them. ♦ (sports-jam)



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## Courtney Walsh Factfile

- 1962:** Born Oct 30, Kingston, Jamaica.
- 1982:** First-class debut for Jamaica.
- 1984:** August - English county debut for Gloucestershire. November - West Indies Test debut against Australia in first Test at Perth.
- 1989:** 100th Test wicket against Australia, Sydney.
- 1993:** Takes 200th Test match wicket against Pakistan in Bridgetown, Barbados.
- 1994:** Appointed West Indies captain for India and New Zealand tours after Richie Richardson ordered to rest.
- 1995:** February - Career-best Test 7-37 in second Test against New Zealand in Wellington. August - 300th Test wicket, sixth Test v England at the Oval.
- 1996:** Named West Indies captain after Richardson resigns at the end of the World Cup.
- 1998:** January - Sacked as captain after West Indies lose all three Tests on 1997 tour of Pakistan. November - Becomes West Indies' leading wicket-taker, passing Malcolm Marshall's 376 mark.
- 1999:** Third man in Test history, after Kapil Dev (434) and Sir Richard Hadlee (431), to take 400 wickets.
- 2000:** Breaks Dev's world record of 434 Test wickets when dismissing Zimbabwe bowler, Henry Olonga, in the second Test at Kingston, Jamaica.
- 2001:** March - Becomes first bowler in history to take 500 Test match wickets. April - On his home ground at Kingston, retires from international cricket after fifth Test against South Africa with 519 Test wickets.

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# The light of many suns

In the beginning, when gods walked the valley of Kathmandu, there was a mound where the temple now stands, and to it daily came a cow to offer her milk. A bewildered cowherd who watched this incredible happening in great awe and fear, at last found the courage to dig at the spot. He had hardly begun when he was consumed by a light like that of many suns emanating from a *linga* with faces of Shiva carved on all four sides. So terrifying was one of the faces that an early invader of the valley looked upon it and died.

There ends the myth and history tentatively begins. Pashupatinath,

I went to the famed Pashupati mystic Shivpuri Baba, a jovial old man with a flowing beard who claimed to be 150 years old. He remembered Queen Victoria being crowned empress of India, and had seen the first train in India.

however small the original shrine, was there when the first settlers raised a perishable town of wood and mud about it on the banks of the sacred Bagmati. The earliest remains are Licchavi, from AD 300 to 800. Licchavi rulers were in close relationship with Gupta India, so Sanskrit was the court language with a

growing interest in Hinduism.

Chinese representatives of the time, visiting the Kathmandu valley, described the fabulous court, carved and ornamented with pearls and gems, as being near the holy temple of Pashupatinath, where the king daily worshipped the deity that protected him.

Long before, when the Mauryan king Ashoka visited the valley, he married his daughter Charumati to a local prince and they founded the city of Dev Patan, close to the most sacred shrine. In the fourteenth century the temple was shattered by the invading army of Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlak: three hundred years later it was eaten through by termites.

King Pratap Malla, in atonement for having seduced a minor girl, added a courtyard filled with Shiva lingas. The last Malla king of Kathmandu stripped the temple of all its gold and had it melted down to finance his war against the invading Gorkhas. Such is the power of Pashupatinath, believe the devout, that he lost the battle.

Pashupatinath, as Shiva in one of his many incarnations, is a protector of animals, so there are no sacrifices at this great shrine. Appropriately, throngs of gossiping monkeys swarm through the temples, feasting off votive offerings and sometimes exploding into violent battles that zoom to and fro across the river, up and down stairs scattering pilgrims, along the ghats,

and through rows of temples. They live on the wooded hill which is part of the temple complex which reaches the airport, until recently called Gaucher, the meadow of cows.

When I first came to Kathmandu, a famed mystic, the Shivpuri Baba, lived on Pashupati hill in a small hut that seemed part of the forest. I went to him and was enchanted by a jovial old man with a flowing beard who claimed to be 150 years old. Lest I doubted him he said he remembered Queen Victoria being crowned empress of India, and had seen the first train in India.

Today, Pashupatinath is a two-tiered pagoda temple with heavily gilded roofs, heavy silver doors that are closed to non-Hindus, and is the centre of a vast conglomeration of temples, shrines, *dharamshalas*, bathing and burning ghats held together by an aura of religious fervour and the smoke from funeral pyres. Here is beauty commissioned by art's greatest patron, religion, so that hardly a stone is unchiselled or wood uncarved. The windows of even the humblest *dharamshalas* are ornamented with wasp-waist deities and intricate floral designs. Temple spires writhe with golden serpents, and on two of the platforms on which the dead are cremated are sixth century stone carvings of rare beauty.

Two festivals blaze in Pashupatinath more brightly than the



others, Shivaratri, when thousands converge on the temple from all over Nepal and India, thronging the area, day and night, and raising shelters and shops wherever space permits. Devotional music is everywhere. At Tij, women from all over the valley walk to the great shrine, married women in their vivid marriage saris and unmarried girls in their brightest best, singing and dancing as they go to bathe in the sacred river and pray at the great temple: the married women for their husbands, the girls for a good and kindly match.

They pour from the temple down the stairway to the river like a burst of scarlet sequins overflowing the ghats

and spilling into the water. In their midst, on a stark stone slab, her feet in the water, an old woman in white lies dying. No one apparently bothers but that is what Pashupatinath is all about, destroyer and protector, both. The eternal riddle of life and death. Every morning Radio Nepal opens its programme with a prayer to Pashupatinath and when the king, himself a reincarnation of Vishnu, addresses his people, he calls upon Pashupatinath to bless and protect them all. ♦

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



MIN BAURACHARYA

## FIELDWORK ANECDOTE

by MARK TURIN

# Learning about Himalayan body parts (through observation rather than participation)



It was four years ago, in late November or early December, that I was sitting outside on a bamboo mat facing the eastern Himalaya. Beside me sat Rana Bahadur Thangmi, a respected shaman and village elder, and the father of my host. I had been staying in his son's house for a few weeks, orientating myself and beginning to learn the Thangmi language. In the late morning sunlight of that day, I decided to try out my first full Thangmi sentence.

Thangmi is a Tibeto-Burman language with a complex verbal agreement system, making it particularly difficult for an English-speaker to learn. I had collected quite a few words in the time that I had been there, and was now ready to try some of them out. It was a Saturday so the village children were home rather than at school, and the area around our house was buzzing with activity. Rana Bahadur looked regal and dignified in a bright red woollen hat as he shared a home-rolled cigarette with his wife. I had decided on my practice sentence: it was to include a subject, an object, two adjectives and, of course, one of those difficult verbs. I looked at him and chose the correct personal pronoun, a respectful form, and then made it into a possessive form. I recalled the adjectives for red and beautiful, the noun for hat and the suitable ending of the verb 'to be'. In short, I was ready.

"Oh, respectful father, village elder and shaman of high-standing..."



Shaman Rana Bahadur Thami in Dolakha District (the man I insulted)

SARA SHNEIDERMAN

My first sentence was complete. Total silence. Women's mouths dropped, hands went up to cover eyes, children stopped pulling the legs off beetles, and men turned to look at me.

I proclaimed unnaturally loudly in my 'I'm speaking to a foreigner in a language I don't speak voice,' "...your red hat is beautiful". My first sentence was complete. The reaction: silence, total silence. Women's mouths dropped, hands went up to cover eyes in shame, children stopped pulling the legs off beetles, and men turned to look at me. Rana Bahadur glanced up from where he was drawing a map in the earth with a stick. "What did you say, my foreign grandson?" My accent was probably difficult to follow. After all, they had never heard me trying to speak their language before. Moreover, he was a little hard of hearing. "Your red hat is beautiful," I said again, but this time with conviction and satisfaction, pronouncing every syllable as clearly as I could. Silence again. Tortured beetles fell to the ground. Rana Bahadur began to shake his head slowly and let out a deep sigh. He was most definitely not amused.

"Grandson," he finally said in Nepali so that I would fully understand, "your country is a long way away." He started most sentences like this, so I was not unduly concerned. "And you have made a great effort and sacrificed much to come and live with us," he said. Nothing untoward so far. "And

now..." he continued, "you have the nerve to insult me in front of my family and my village... have you no shame?" My contentedness at my linguistic achievement withered as it dawned on me that I hadn't said quite what I had intended to say. As the giggling started and as children began to whisper to each other and point at me, I desperately looked around for assistance. A young man, about my age, was peering down from the porch of the house in front of which I was sitting. He was shaking his head with a mixture of disgust and pity. Making eye contact with him, I gestured incomprehension with my hands. In answer, he shook his head as he pointed to his hair and then nodded as he pointed to his groin. My first Thangmi sentence hadn't come out as planned.

I spent the rest of the afternoon apologising and attempting to undo what I had said. Thankfully, Rana Bahadur, being a considerate man, forgave my linguistic transgression. To this day though, my Thangmi friends giggle whenever I say 'hat' in their language. After a few glasses of the local firewater, however, I can't remember for the life of me which is which. ♦

An earlier version of this article was published 'Learning Himalayan Body Parts', in ILAS Newsletter, No 24, February 2001, p. 18 [ISSN 0929-87381]

Mark Turin is completing a grammar of the Thangmi language and is a member of the Himalayan Languages Project at Leiden University in The Netherlands.



# Different strokes

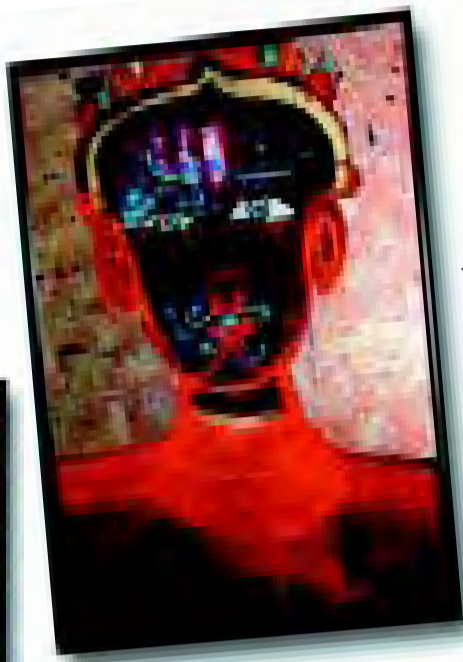
SALIL SUBEDI

On a cold winter day, sadhus at Pashupati wrapped in ragged *gundris* sit beside a dying fire and watch the funeral pyres. Somewhere in Patan, the god of compassion *rato machhendra* is splashed with red vermillion and clothed in rich red before being taken out on a chariot. Meanwhile, the five Bodhisattva—the five different forms of the Buddha—enshrined in countless alleyways and *bahals* spread around the Valley glimmer



in the twilight as a couple prepares to tie the knot in a temple. These are the cityscapes 51-year-old artist Roy Breimon walks through, observing keenly. He then retreats and recreates them with brushstrokes and acrylic on Plexiglas. Breimon uses an unusual technique called reverse painting. Breimon applies many layers of colours mixed with bronze and gold powder, so his work has a rich metallic lustre. “I am very impressed by the intensity of the colours of life here. The basic colours people have

If, after viewing the show, you shut your eyes, the colours and forms are imprinted, as Nabokov’s Humbert said of his muse, on the inside of your eyelids.



white eyes, all against a black backdrop. It seems that here, vigorous life is coming into being from pure emptiness, infinite space.

But Breiman’s are not all metaphysical ponderings, removed from the people around us everyday. Because he is out there, watching the faces that watch others and recreating them in *The Guardians*, gazing at the visitor. There are faces that are giving, (the different Buddhas) and those that appear like caretakers (*Pujari*). “I try and unveil the mask that every human carries. I observe faces wherever I go. Faces are my subjects,” says Breiman of his unique perspective on human visages. He dims them or exaggerates them to reflect the influence their surroundings have on them.

Occasionally, this requires a departure from rich, deep colours. “I like white. It is very pure,” he admits. In the collection of 31 paintings currently on show at the Indigo Art Gallery, there are colours ranging from the very dark shades in *Mahadev* to life-giving, sparkling tints in *The Guardians*. And, that is at the core of what one takes away from the show: the colours Breiman uses together with his lines delineate figures, particularly, in *Ishwar*, *Kava Bahal Pilgrims* and *Devotees* that are unforgettable. If, after viewing the show, you shut your eyes,

the colours and forms are imprinted, as Nabokov’s Humbert said of his muse, on the inside of your eyelids. Almost like a laser show projected against the night sky. “I consider the projection of every innermost feeling, even death, as pure beauty,” he says.

Breiman has been working exclusively with reverse image painting since 1981. Basically, the image is first painted on to the back of the Plexiglas, and worked from the foreground to the background to enhance depth and texture. The spluttering of colours in *Faces of Shakti* gives a dynamism to the texture, while the undulating lines in *Naga* and the geometric patterns in *Yantra Deity* display well the flexibility one has in stroke-making in reverse paintings.

Breiman, also a theatre, ballet and opera set designer, studied art as a fifteen-year-old at the University of Mexico in Satillo and had his first major exhibition in Washington DC in 1976. He has had numerous exhibitions including in Berlin, Los Angeles, Miami, Barcelona, and Washington DC. This is his second exhibition in Nepal. When asked what makes him paint Kathmandu’s faces the way he does, he says: “I like people who are really devoted to what they believe in. I don’t like obsessive and intolerant people. And that is the trait I have followed all

different forms of fish. Pisvejc, however, is not in the city at the moment.)

Nepal Vision II Paintings by Roy Breimon and Vaclav Pisvejc. Until 29 May. Timings: 8am-6pm daily. Indigo Gallery, Naxal. #413580

Kilroy's

HAPPENINGS



ARMY SPICE: Wives of cadets from the Royal Nepal Army’s Command and Staff Force emerge after the convocation ceremony carrying certificates on 20 April in Tokha.



PLAYING WOUNDED: WHO-Nepal staffer Shiva Ram (inset with mask off) being carried out by colleagues during a disaster simulation at UN House in Pulchowk on 25 April.



EVERY DROP MATTERS: Representatives from a consortium of donors supporting the Melamchi Project to augment Kathmandu Valley’s water supply address the press on 24 April

Sharp



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

here is the daily weather report. Roughly speaking, there may be some chances of partly cloudiness here-and-there in isolated parts of the kingdom in the next 24 hours or so approximately. Or there may be not. Let's face it: no one really knows. In fact, there is a fat chance that strong storms will rake the not-so-isolated parts of the kingdom as well, but we can't say that because this is a government-controlled weather report, and we have made it a habit to err on the side of caution. But what we can say with some degrees (between 30-32 Celsius maximum and 10-12 Celsius minimum) of certainty is that the temperature on the streets of Kathmandu will rise as a result of a high-pressure system bringing a lot of hot air from a certain large country in the vicinity which has requested anonymity. Meanwhile, across the Himalaya, moisture-laden clouds that could bring some welcome relief are stuck in Khasa because of a customs dispute over VAT. That may be the end of today's weather report, but we're not too sure. And now, to end the news here are the main points once again:

The Defensive Minister has said he is working with the NC CWC, HMG/N, MOFA, CPN-UML, RPP, NSP, NMKP, ETC to have the NSC get the APF, IDAD and the ISDP to counter the CPN-M/PP through its SWISH strategy, building on past KS-II, IRDP, RNAC, CPRDPPED, the NWSC and last but not least, the MWSP.

The Minister of Culture and Agriculture has stressed the role of media in the under-development of the country. Speaking at the inauguration of the All-Nepal Non-working Journalists' Society (Counter-revolutionary) he said: "Journalists should try not to make anything up. But if they want to, they should check with me first."

The executive committee of the Nepal chapter of the International Union of Parliamentarians Who Boycott Parliament but Still Collect Their Daily Allowances (ICPWBPSDA) held a meeting in Singha Darbar this week.

The meeting was presided over by the parliamentary party's Chief Whipping Boy, who demanded a CIAA inquiry into the deteriorating quality of the samosas served during executive committee meetings. The meeting also prepared a strategy White Paper to be presented by a 14-member Nepali delegation attending the next ICPWBPSDA World Congress to be held in Acapulco which this year has

the theme: "Case Studies of Effective Methods to Bring the House Down".

The World Meteorology Day Celebration Main Committee held its first preparatory meeting today and decided to celebrate World Meteorology Day in a grand manner by hosting various programmes, walkathons and talkathons. A sub-committee under the Chairmanship of the Department of Environment and Supernatural Resources is organising a special prayer vigil to draw up a petition to Lord Indra to ensure a hale and hearty monsoon this year so that things will be generally unfair throughout the kingdom. ♦

Mainly unfair throughout the kingdom



NEPALI SOCIETY



SALIL SUBEDI

AMBULANCE

What is a German fire truck and ambulance doing crossing into Nepal from India? Well, they have travelled overland all the way from Germany, and are part of a campaign by a Nepali neurosurgeon and his wife to upgrade emergency equipment in Nepal. Bhawani Narsimha Rana ("BN" to his friends) and his wife Renate have so far brought seven ambulances and three fire trucks for different hospitals and municipalities in Nepal. BN's sons, Renate's brother or friends of friends have driven the vehicles across Europe, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and through India into Nepal. That is a lot of trouble, but for BN's relatives and friends it is adventure with a purpose. The first ambulance was driven to Nepal overland in the

early 1980s, and is still being used at the hospital for the disabled in Jorpati. BN spends his own money to bring the vehicles over, but doesn't drive them himself anymore. He is also finding it more and more difficult to come overland, because of border hassles and tax red-tape in Nepal. BN and Renate run a charity through which they raise funds for social work in Nepal. Their work ranges from an orphanage in Chapagaon with 100 children, raising funds for an Old Age Home and girls' hostel called Abentureland in Godavari inaugurated by the prime minister recently. The couple also conduct an international conference on medicine in Kathmandu every year. The next one is scheduled end-2001.

BN left Nepal in 1960 to study medicine in Heidelberg. After specialising in neurosurgery, he began perfecting new medical techniques for patients with nerve disorders. All along, BN wanted to help disadvantaged people back home and the inspiration for bringing the emergency vehicles to Nepal was his brother Sambhu Rana, a driving and vintage car enthusiast. BN has seen the limits of western medicine, and feels that ayurvedic remedies have a lot of potential especially in pain relief. BN, who is with the Pain Research Society of Germany, says: "We should not forget these ancient traditions. They carry the ultimate answer to a lot of things." ♦



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