

NEPALI Times

NEPAL'S TOP NEWSPAPER

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YAKYETIYAK

New comic strip starring an existential yeti and a talkative yak.

18

Soon, the monsoon

10-11



EXCLUSIVE

Trade blues

Business leaders from Nepal and India are meeting in New Delhi 11 June to iron out problems trading problems before the bilateral treaty comes up for automatic renewal later this year. The FNCCI is taking a study that among other things proves India's concerns about Nepali "problem" exports are unfounded. India has been insisting up to 35 percent value-addition. The FNCCI says the 1996 treaty has benefited both sides so there is no need to change it. Currently 250 Nepali companies are qualified to export to India but of that only 50 are actually exporting. Only 10 do substantial business. Value addition won't affect genuine exporters only fly-by-night businesses on both sides.

Call Nepal

The UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal is the happiest man around, having forced the country to shut down for three days to fight Girija Koirala on his behalf. He told a radio talk show the forced strike was a "resounding success" even though he dodged a question on why his party didn't go for hunger strikes instead. Nepal said the public's response to the strike was "phenomenal" and his party is planning more bandhs. If you want to give Madhav Nepal a piece of your mind, call him at 278712 (o) or 544373 (h).



Net tax



Nepal's Internet connectivity is supposed to be the best in South Asia. It is the cheapest Internet in the region, except for India. And Nepal was cited at the recent Least Developed Country conference in Brussels as the developing country with one of the best Internet access. All this is now threatened by a government plan to tax the information technology industry to death. Falling revenue and increased administrative spending have forced the government to get its tax men to target all potential sources of revenue, and the axe seems to be about to fall on Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

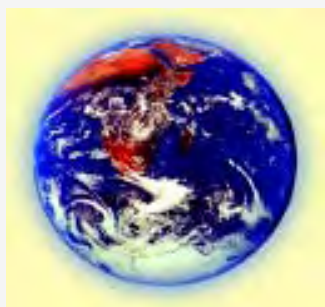
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KATHBANDHU



SUBHAS RAI

one world...



...one link

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LONG LIVE THE KING

The national anthem is anathema to our revolutionary friends. They say it promotes a personality cult (coming from them, this sounds somewhat odd) and that it exhorts Nepalis to keep reproducing (now, that is a problem). Besides the Monarch, Chairman Prachanda is the only one actually mentioned by name in our national anthem (“*prachanda pratapi bhupati*”) so the Maoists should actually have nothing against it. But, seriously, how does it help anybody in Nepal to be so pig-headed about this? We commissioned an unauthorised translation of the original Nepali words composed by Chakrapani Chalise 80 years ago to pinpoint exactly what is the problem with our national anthem:

*His Majesty, upright and solemn Nepali,
Exceptionally powerful monarch.
May His Majesty always be blessed with success.
Let the Lord in Heaven grant him a long life,
Let his subjects multiply,
And let us exalt him with a hymn of love and praise
All of us Nepalis together.*

Percival Landon, the English hagiographer of Chandra Sumshere Jung Bahadur Rana, writes in his book (*Nepal*, Constable, 1928) that the words of *Sri Man Gambhir* were rendered after the royal bandmaster (a certain Mr A M Pathan from British India) had already composed the music. As it turns out, the words bear an uncanny similarity to *God Save the Queen*, while the tune marches in step with the French anthem, the *Marseillaise*. As with *God Save the Queen*, our anthem too seems outdated in an age of constitutional monarchy. But it may be worthwhile for republican-minded Nepalis to note that these words from a bygone era should today be construed to refer to the symbol of Nepali nationhood and not just to the person of His Majesty. We agree on one thing, though: let us take out that bit on multiplying.

SHUTDOWN—OR—ELSE



Riot police wait for showdown during shutdown on Tuesday.

bunch of bickering lefties for whom the meaning of democracy has come down to deflating tyres of bicycles belonging to vegetable vendors and office peons.

How utterly symbolic that the motorcycle our comrades decided to torch this week happened to belong to the Bangladesh Embassy. After all, by declaring an unprecedented three-day nationwide shutdown-or-else they proved that their role model is the hartal superpower of the subcontinent. And when Comrade Nepal tells the press that he has been deluged with phone calls from fellow-comrades congratulating him on the resounding success of his lovely bandh, he is too busy basking in the glory to ask if people stayed at home because they shared his political vision, or because they didn't want their motorcycles cremated on the streets. (Never underestimate the power of the Kathmandu's salaried class to stay at home at the slightest provocation.)

Jhal Nath Khanal in a chat with us last week (p. 3, #44) let out the real reason the UML forced the country to close for three days. He said: we have to be on the streets otherwise the Maoists will be there. (Or words to that effect.) The UML strategy therefore boils down to this: paralyse parliament, paralyse the streets. Maybe the UML should find out why that leftist bastion in India, Kerala, has banned bandhs. No form of protest is legitimate if people are forced out of fear to obey. We don't agree that you force others to agree with you. This isn't a spontaneous uprising like it was in 1990. This isn't People Power, it is just Power At Any Cost. By being on the streets, the UML is just showing the ultra-violent left that it also matters.

The result of all this is that Girija Koirala ends up being equated with democracy. This is dangerous not just for the UML, but also for the country. If Koirala goes, as he soon must, does it mean we bid good bye to democracy as well? The Prime Minister has brought this curse upon himself, his party and the nation by clinging on when there were several chances for a graceful exit. But greed rules. With three major multi-billion rupee government contracts pending, the kickbacks to be made on those procurements seem to be a powerful inducement for his cronies to convince him to hang on for a bit longer.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

mediocrity.com.np

It is the mediocrity of the middle-class that feeds the Maoist insurgency in Nepal.

Despite stark differences in income levels and standards of living, the Nepali elite and its middle class have a lot in common. Nationalistic hubris, paranoia of people from the plains, and an excessive attachment to the achievements of ancestors are traits that define an acceptable person in Kathmandu's high society. And these are exactly the values that we, lower down the class ladder, attempt to cultivate in order to become agreeable and acceptable.

When the qualities to aspire for are so pedestrian and parochial, there is no need to give anything our best. In academics, economics, social, literary or even sports getting by is enough. Like buffaloes happily chewing the cud in the mud of a drying pond in the late summer afternoon, the Nepali middle-of-the-road class wallows in the cesspool of its own collective mediocrity. With our puny dreams and small sacrifices, we ridicule mass-based politicians and expect false heroes to release us from our suffering. Our yearning for simplistic solutions to complex social problems, our devotion to the done ways of doing things, our longing for a divine saviour whenever faced with a challenge, our dissatisfaction with the present and desperation about future, and our eagerness to jump to quick conclusions—these are all links of a chain of fatalism that keeps us in bondage.

You would think that a relatively young ideology like Maoism would be free of such shackles of socialisation. But Nepali followers of the Great Helmsman exhibit the same traits as the rest of us. It would be too much to expect otherwise. Their concerns are as superficial as the Nepali elite, their preoccupations are as peripheral as those of Nepali bourgeoisie, and they love obfuscation as much as the ministers we see everyday speechifying on the evening news. All of these attributes are on vivid display in the agitation against private schools by the student wing of Nepali Maoists. Private schools re-opened, but the agitation is far from over.

The Maoists are right about one thing

through: our schools are sick. Government-run public schools suffer from politics. Teachers do not teach, they spend their time in preaching the doctrine of the political party that they are affiliated with. The Maoists are taking full advantage of public school teachers, collecting one-third of their meagre salaries. Their concern for the quality of instruction in

public schools is as shallow as the neglect by the community and government. Where did the dictators of the proletariat and their progenies go to school? Most private schools, on the other hand, have consciously stayed out of politics, and chased mammon. The operating principle there is not social justice, but freedom of choice. Profit being their prime motive, promoters of private schools seldom have any interest in creating a concerned citizen. What they actually produce are economic robots: persons aware of their rights, but ambivalent at best of their responsibilities towards society.

SOBS (Students of Boarding Schools) parrot popular slogans of parlour patriotism, chic environmentalism and genteel social service. But the free-market is their main mantra. SOBS are taught to seek value for money. The child, the sick, the old, the dying and the poor—‘non-economic persons’—do not figure in their world-view. Not all private schools are created equal. A ‘boarding school’ in Patan (Baitadi) and a private school in Patan (Lalitpur) are as different as a government school and a private limited school. But both are mass-producing foot soldiers of global capitalism by creating consumers. Private schools are addressing the quality gap with an ideological filling of free-for-all capitalism.

No wonder, the Maoists see this as an ideological war for the minds of the young. So, their solution: if there are rats in the house, burn it down. They are using an axe where a scalpel would do. This madness has been characteristic of Maoist methods wherever they have risen: Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Cambodia, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh. But the agitation against private schools in Nepal suffers from a more fundamental flaw—that of mixed-up priorities.

To start with, do the Maoists seriously think that Nepali students of Rupy's International will rush back to Padmodaya? In all probability, they will catch the first

available flight to Bangalore, and start singing *Jana Gana Mana* with even more gusto in some frightfully expensive private school in Kodaikanal, Ootacmund or Mercara. If the Elite's Co-ed were to be closed, their Nepali students will fill the Bhadrapur flights and journey onwards to Kurseong and Darjeeling.

Our comrades must note that a completely closed proletarian utopia is no more possible in a globalised world. Cuba and North Korea are exhibits in glass cases. The aim should be for damage control by opting for the lesser of available evils. Before beating up the principals of allegedly Indian schools, the Maoists should have analysed what the consequence of their action would be: force Nepalis to study in Indian schools in India. And even if pricey private schools were to cut their fees by two-thirds, we in the lower-middle class will still not be able to afford them. Such a cut will benefit the elite kids who will pay even less! Would it not be more sensible to tax these education factories dispensing ‘quality education’, and then use the proceeds to improve facilities in public schools? May be then we induce Honourable Ishwar Pokharel's son back to Nepal, and prompt him to study in Nandi Ratri.

The demand for free education up to tenth grade in all public schools is equally puerile. Free education, if not supported by compulsory schooling and mid-day meals, benefits only those who can afford to pay the fees anyway. Free education does not work in a society where caste and class often coalesce, and grinding poverty makes formal schooling a luxury for children who must work to make a living.

To improve the quality of education in public schools, the challenge lies in attracting students back by restoring power to it once again. Maybe we should ask all public officials (elected, selected and appointed—including Ward Chairpersons and Army Generals) to send their children to public schools. After all, it's a fact that no government official—not even a cabinet minister—can afford to pay the fees of private schools from their salaries alone. And five-star schools will pay taxes just like five-star hotels.

Nepali communists prefer the time-tested bourgeois way of creating a spectacle rather than making an impact. So the student wing of main opposition party CPN (UML) sets chairs of District Education Officers on fire. Students affiliated to CPN (ML) burn microbuses to obtain concession fares. Students swearing by Maoism vanadise schools. Is this about education? No, it is about power. And the middle-class manufactures apology for one or the other of them. It's a minor miracle that the mess isn't worse. It is the mediocrity of the middle-class that feeds the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. ♦





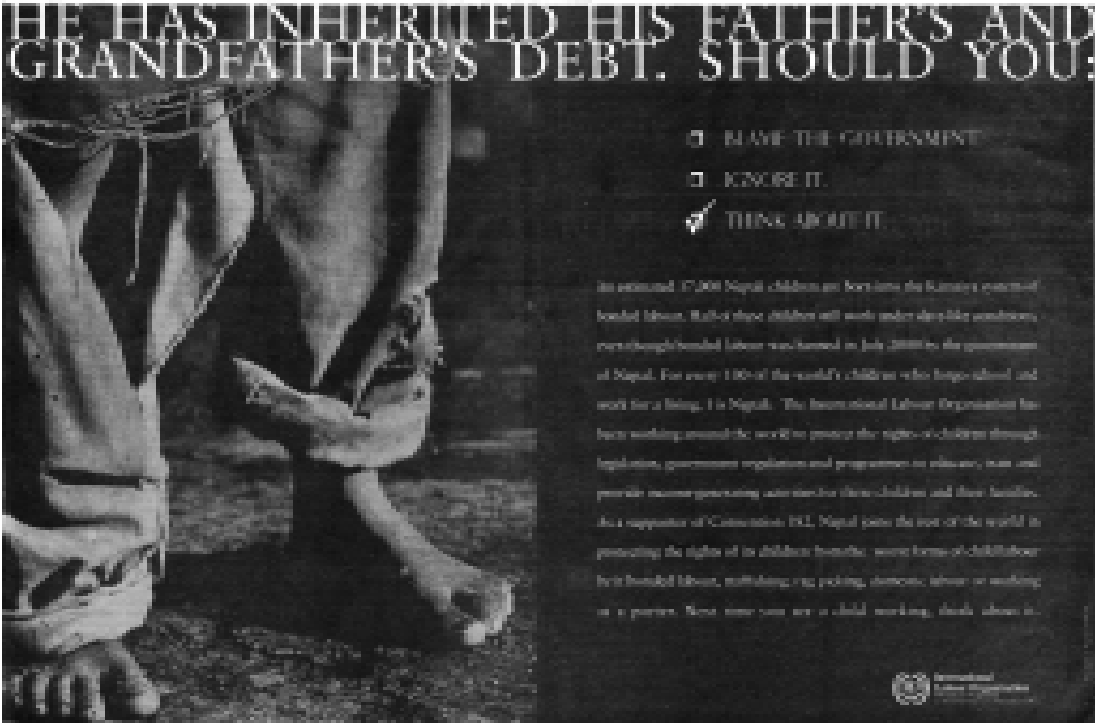
Need to know नेपाली

Last month, the International Labour Organisation organised media blitz to alert Nepalis of the ills of child labour, giving us, among other things, the sobering information that one in a hundred child workers in the world today is a Nepali. The campaign was a good idea, and the print adverts were nicely done. *But why did the ILO national office decide to do it all in English?*

An organisation addressing an excruciatingly real national problem, which requires the mass public to be sensitised, decides to impart the message in a tongue that the public cannot understand. Why would the UN agency do something so breath-takingly inappropriate as this?

The labour agency is only one of many to have erred on the side of English. Expatriate development agency managers and their English-speaking Nepali counterparts and programme officers often suffer from the delusion that “If I understand it, then they will too.” The inability to fathom the role of Nepali in Nepal is why vacancy announcements for drivers and gardeners are put out in the Occidental tongue, why NGOs ubiquitously seek project proposals and reports only in English, why diplomats are sometimes clueless about political ground realities because they only get a sample translation of papers that are the local staple, and why innumerable manuals are produced on everything from midwifery to animal husbandry—in English.

The absence of the Nepali language in the upper echelons of the agencies, INGOs and even some NGOs skews the pitch for Nepali development because of the unbridgeable semantic distance this creates between the *bakims* and the masses. Many *bidesis*, whether diplomat or development-wallah, miss out on the richness of the discourse in the Nepali newspapers, and so believe that there is hardly any debate in the country about, say, the



Why did the ILO national office do this in English?

Maobadi. They are forced to party only with the English-speaking Kathmandu elite, and hence gain a fashionably warped view on what’s going on. They cannot get to the depth of the sociological churning in a country that is rushing to modernise while jettisoning its cultural moorings, and therefore reach for simplistic two-dimensional models of a ‘fatalistic’ society.

The dangers of consorting with Nepal’s English-speaking brackets over cocktails and at barbecues cannot be overstated. For, while elsewhere in South Asia you can get down to a lower-middle class level in English, here the imperial language will deliver almost exclusively the urban economic elite. Even some of our best scholars cannot communicate in English, leave alone politicians, administrators and journalists. The possibility of having easy conversations and developing friendships with ‘locals’ is therefore limited to the urban rich. And most of the English-savvy upper-class scions attended school and college outside

Nepal (mostly in India). So there is every reason to suspect the accuracy of their pontifications about their own country.

Kasto chha...

It is easy to understand why our diplomats and development partners never get past the ‘*kasto chha*’ and ‘*dhanyabaaad*’ stage in Nepali 101. The average stint of the average dip or dev is three to four years, so there is hardly the time to master the language enough to be able to break the class barrier. But that is no reason to neglect the role of Nepali language in Nepal, and promote it as a medium for social, economic and cultural advancement.

Because Nepal was never politically colonised, English did not become the lingua franca of the economic and administrative elites, as it did in the rest of the subcontinent. Until 1950 and the departure of the Ranas, Nepali (formerly *Khas Kura*) itself was largely the language of the expansionary *parbatiya* groups,

which had spread themselves in a sprinkling across the country. With the ‘nation building project’ of the Panchayat years, spear-headed initially by King Mahendra, the young language rapidly expanded to serve as the governmental tongue and the link language of the population.

Much is wrong with this linguistic evolution, particularly the fact that Nepali gained its present supremacy at the expense of other national languages and dialects. For too long, the Nepali language has been the preserve of the pre-eminent castes and classes who have taken advantage of it to move ahead in administration and various social sectors. For too long Nepali has been producing only literature—poetry and short stories and novellas—when the need now is to promote intellectual discourse through works in the social sciences.

These are problems, but the answer is not to throw the linguistic baby with the bathwater. If one is to look to the future, while the myriad mother

tongues of Nepal must be protected and the country’s cultural diversity preserved, it is only Nepali which can serve as the cultural springboard on the national plane. If Nepal is the chosen nation-state structure within which to try and deliver prosperity to Nepalis, then our economic dynamics, cultural advance, and social cohesion will have to be supported by the Nepali language.

It could have been Newar, Limbu or Tharu Bhasa, if history had been otherwise. If history had been other-otherwise it could even have been Tibetan, Chinese, English or Hindi. But Nepali it is, and we have got to work with it.

English is an overwhelmingly important language, and it is true we will not progress without accessing the world of ideas and communications that is available through English. Today, it is mainly professionals who have some English, and future Nepali administrators, politicians, journalists, activists, teachers, all must have adequate command of the language if they are to upgrade their thinking and productivity. But for the foreseeable future, Nepali will be the language of communication, governance, planning, activism, the courts, public education and even (except right at the top) business and trade.

As far as social cohesion is concerned, whatever its provenance, Nepali remains the single language for the whole country. Before you turn your nose up at Nepali as the language of the Bahuns, bear in mind that it is in Nepali that the Limbu will speak to the Tharu, the Rai to the Dolpopa, the Yadav to the Gurung, and the Chhetri to the Newar.

A newspaper in Nepali crosses all the caste, ethnic and class barriers among the literate population. While in every other South Asian country, there is a widening divide between the English-speakers and the ‘vernacular language’ mass, Nepali saves us from this pre-determined

tunnel of societal crisis. Here, the same newspaper is read across the spectrum, from the government secretaries to the ministers, the shopkeepers, the academics, and the labouring class. Nepali is a fine tool for social change, it only has to be recognised as such.

International agencies which have power over resources seem to have neglected Nepali in the myopic belief that it is an establishmentarian language, without considering that this can be changed. It is this neglect of Nepali that, to some extent, explains why there is no sense of urgency to rescue public schooling, which has been in free fall for a decade. One reason may be that the medium of instruction is Nepali. While the English-speakers revel in visions of Nepal entering the IT era, no one is really bothered by the fact that the Nepali office clerk or lowly accountant cannot access the data-processing power of the computer where it matters because nobody has bothered to standardise Nepali Devanagari. Nepal is in the midst of a democratising radio revolution (good governance and all that), but most *bikase bidesis* in town do not know of this. Why? Because the language of FM radio is mostly Nepali. Similarly, no one is concerned that there is next to nothing in the name of children’s programming on Nepal Television. Because they do not watch NTV.

All this displays, really, a lack of empathy, and genuine interest in the lives of Nepalis. The next time you see an advertisement, signboard, manual, directions, instructions meant for the public at large—and notice that it is in English—ask yourself whether this does not show disregard. For all Nepalis. ♦

Kanak Mani Dixit was born a Bahun, and besides publishing *Himal Khabarpatrika* is Member Secretary of Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, the Nepali library of record.

LETTERS

LUMBINI
If truth be told, archaeological finds do not conclusively establish Tilaurakot, Lumbini, as the birthplace of the Buddha (“Buddha was born here”, #43). The archaeological argument, on the basis of which Sher Bahadur Deuba announced Lumbini as the Buddha’s birth place in 1996 amid much fanfare, runs as follows: the inscription on the Ashok pillar in the Mayadevi Temple complex says that emperor Ashok placed a stone slab as a marking on the place where the Buddha was born. An archaeological team comprising Nepali and Japanese experts unearthed the stone slab in the process of excavating the Mayadevi Temple in Lumbini. Therefore, the Buddha was born in Lumbini.

This argument has a few holes. Could emperor Ashok, who lived some centuries after the Buddha, have made a mistake? Could he have actually strayed four miles north to Tilaurakot during his pilgrimage to the Buddha’s birth place? And what if the Ashok pillar itself, along with

the stone slab, was a hoax planted by a prescient tarai chieftain to claim the Buddha for the future Nepal?

I am not discrediting the archaeological argument for the Buddha’s birth place but putting things in the right perspective. All that the archaeological finds accomplish is provide an inductive certainty about Lumbini as the Buddha’s birthplace. And, as everyone knows, an inductive conclusion is only probabilistic, it is never conclusive. We get hysterical every time some Indian source suggests Piprahawa in India as the Buddha’s birthplace. Deep down, we don’t seem so certain. Hence the hysteria.

Kanden Thebe
Taplejung

Does it really matter whether the Buddha was born in Nepal or India since neither nation state actually existed when he was born? The Buddha must be having a good laugh at how our nationalistic hackles rise.

T Shakya
by email

WHAT NEXT?

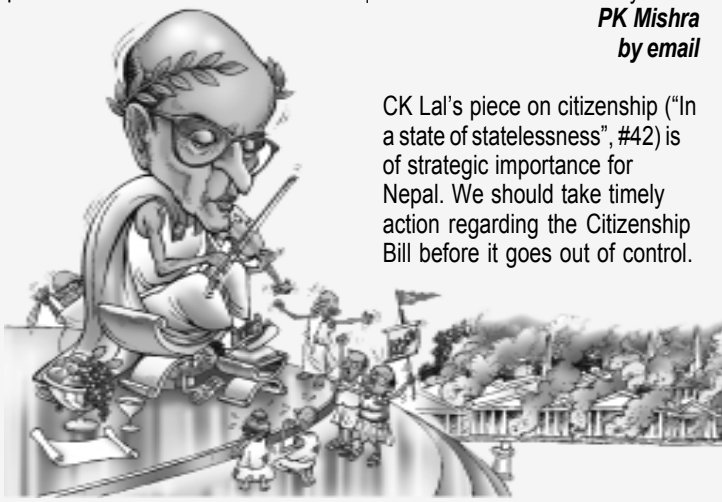
We have been running our handicraft shop in Kupondol for the last 14 years and we have always had a signboard outside telling our customers who we are: Self-financing women from Dhankuta believing in and practising fair trade. Without notice or warning the police suddenly decided to remove our signboard. Why? When the Home Minister is sending the police and army out to win people’s hearts and minds they certainly don’t win ours by stealing our signboard. What will they take next?

Nita Khawas
The Dhankuta Sisters’
Handicrafts

TIME TO STAY

CK Lal’s columns carry his signature courage, wit and bite that have delighted me, but his logic at times appears skewed. In his column “Time to Go” (#43) Lal’s conclusion that Girija Koirala must resign goes against the dense evidence and analysis he packs through out the

piece cataloguing the prime minister’s strengths as a democratically elected leader, his elected status as the party president, his elected status as the leader of the majority party in the parliament, his undefeated record as a parliamentarian and so on. Yet Lal concludes that Koirala should resign. The conclusion is neither dialectical, nor circular nor linear—it’s a leap of emotion. Koirala the president and Koirala the citizen of



democratic Nepal must discipline his unruly party members and ask Koirala the prime minister to stay and weather the storm for the sake of Nepal’s fragile democracy.

Nobody in Nepal possesses a magic wand to fix the country’s long-standing problems overnight, not even the king. We have seen them all. What if democracy is short-circuited again as in 2017 BS? Boisterous Nepalis, including Lal, may have to keep their mouths shut for another 30 years.

PK Mishra
by email

CK Lal’s piece on citizenship (“In a state of statelessness”, #42) is of strategic importance for Nepal. We should take timely action regarding the Citizenship Bill before it goes out of control.

We do not have any right to deny citizenship to Nepalis. Political parties must take the long-term perspective and act now.

Rajesh Gautam
Kathmandu

CK Lal is a bigot. Why do you keep publishing his trash?

P Swar
by email

CONGRATULATIONS
Nepal’s special brand of supermarket communism has just set a national record with four days of shutdowns. Congratulations, comrades. Since you already have a party office rivaling Narayanhiti, why don’t you capitalise on your shutdowns and add trekking from the airport to our list of tourist attractions. And why haven’t you started selling “I survived a bandh” T-shirts in Thamel. Where is your entrepreneurship, comrades? Govind Pokhrel
USA

After 10 years, ex-kamaiyas find strength in numbers

The experience of a group of former kamaiyas, out of bonded labour for over a decade, indicates the difficult road ahead for those recently "freed" by a government edict.

preferable," recalls Thaga Chaudhary, a former kamaiya.

Things started looking up for them with the restoration of multiparty democracy 11 years ago. As the first local elections were approaching, political parties began casting about for new ways to woo voters. The Village Development Committee (VDC) office of Surmi Nala in Kailali district provided these few kamaiyas and other landless squatters plots of land to build huts. Once they had a roof over their heads, they began thinking of work. But they had only farming skills, and because their new land-holdings were far too small for anything but subsistence farming, they could never grow enough food to feed themselves.

The former kamaiya families were working independently, and had almost given up hope of ensuring proper meals for their children. In 1998, Creation of a Creative Society (CCS) a local group started by young activists in Kailali, gave them a chance to restore their confidence in their skills and experience. The kamaiyas realised that their most valuable asset was their knowledge of the seasons, crops, soil and water. CCS brought scattered kamaiya families together and provided them a seed fund of Rs 30,000.



Phulpati Chaudhari, president, and Jag Mohan Chaudhari, accountant of the Ekta Bachat Samuha.



Taking turns with chores at the vegetable garden.

A community farm belonging to former kamaiyas in Kailali district

HEMLATA RAI IN KAILALI

Unlike 200,000 of their brothers and sisters in bonded labour until last year, they got their freedom a decade ago. But it has taken ten families of former kamaiyas a long time to find security through a unique effort at collective farming. But real freedom from poverty remains a distant dream. Even though

the future still looks uncertain, the small patch of land they farm together means there is food for the children and they can go to school instead of herding animals.

Ten years ago, these kamaiyas from Kailali district managed to do the unthinkable—they repaid their "owners" the *sauki*, the perpetually mounting debts that required them to remain in servitude to their landlords. But their ordeals did not

end with freedom. They faced extreme poverty and desperation, as they had to leave the small plots of land they cultivated for their families. "When our children were hungry and crying, we thought about going back to the *kisans* (the landholding farmers who used to "own" the kamaiyas) to ask for loans. But then we thought the better of it—even death seemed

HERE AND THERE

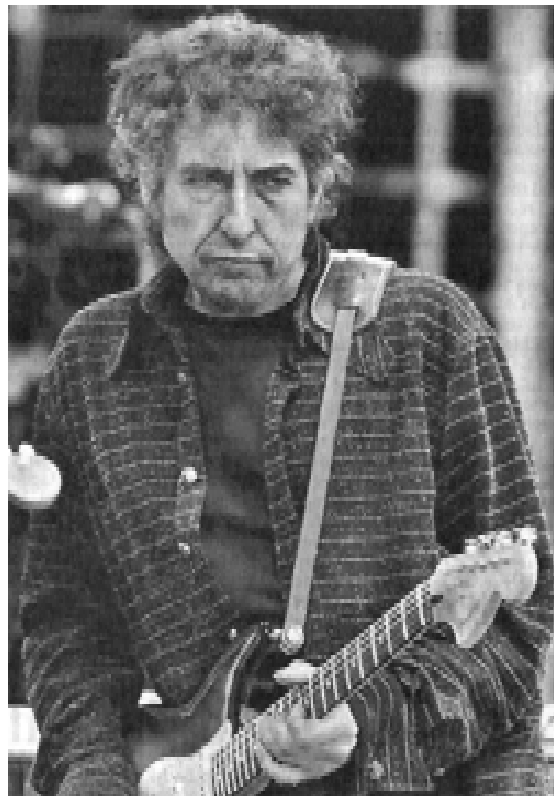
by DANIEL LAK

Things fall apart, eventually

Writing in a recent edition of *Time* magazine, columnist Roger Rosenblatt laments the absence of great issues in America these days. Other than the soaring price of petrol, most denizens of the United States, it seems, have little to exercise their sense of outrage. Whatever happened to poverty, racism, inequality and the other great causes, Rosenblatt writes.

What a luxury to live in a land where you have to look really hard to find a good cause. They are, of course, out there—just like the truth in the X files. Even the most developed societies still have pressing questions of poverty and exclusivity that have yet to be fully resolved. It's just that the vast middle classes, and people who define themselves as such, are more numerous now than ever before. Incomes have kept pace with aspirations, or at least access to credit has created that illusion.

Contrast this great comfortable muddle—who can't find anything meaningful to get excited about—with South Asian countries, or Africa. These are the places where Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" is a users' guide to daily life. Here in Nepal it's bands and



Pick your cause. Hone your outrage. Get to work.

corruption and revolution in the hills. Over in India it's population, Pakistan and, yes, corruption. South Africa worries about AIDS, crime and race relations. Israel and Palestine have each other. Boy do they ever. Pick your cause. Hone your outrage, get to work.

In the past, idealistic youth from the developed world used to do just that. Remember the hordes of sandal-wearing, deadlocked children of the suburbs who picked coffee in Nicaragua when President Reagan was waging proxy war against the Sandinistas. Never mind that the Nepali Maoists make the Ortega brothers' politics seem Thatcherite by comparison. No one is paying much attention to such things anymore. And I wonder why. It isn't for lack of trying by the media, although I suppose we could be doing better. It isn't because diplomats in foreign capitals don't try to make their patch seem significant and meaningful back home. After all, that's the path to success. Even much derided national governments in troubled lands labour to put their plight across, even if it's only for a bagful of development aid, or a trade concession.

It's been apparent for some time now that most

industrial countries are in the grip of unprecedented complacency. And I think I know why. It's we forty-somethings. We're in charge now. The baby boomers are here, at the top, and we're very, very pleased with ourselves. It's the Blair-Clinton revolution—steal the economic policies of their political enemies and cloth them in faux-trendy youth-speak. No left turns allowed, but occasionally you can check the rear view mirror and see what's out there on the sinister side. Keep the bankers and the markets happy, and let bread and circuses soothe the masses. Those hairy monsters who thrive on tear gas and television cameras at various global trade fora—Trotskyists, recidivists, publicity seekers, scum.

Our smugness, it seems to me, is self-induced blindness on a grand scale. I wonder if what I call the crises-to-come aren't just around the corner. A short—and by no means complete—list will suffice. The oceans have no more fish. Global warming is a generation away from hitting us hard, very hard. Our food is poisonous. A thousand ethnic or communal conflicts are on the boil. The legions of the world's poor know just how rich we are, thanks to satellite television. Big places like China or Indonesia could face social mayhem, even implosion, as the world watches helplessly. It's never been so easy to find child pornography or buy a slave. We're all addicted to data and how long can it be before hackers and terrorists make common cause.

Call me Cassandra, but that's not the point. All I'm saying is that there is a lot to get exercised about, causes abound and we forty-somethings are past it already. Our children are coming, and I think they're already smarter than us. My daughter has been listening to Bob Dylan. The times they are definitely a-changing... again. ♦



They also helped the newly organised farmers lease a plot of 10 *kattha* (approximately 0.34 hectares) to start their collective farming exercise. Interestingly, this is the exact area of land per family that free kamaiyas and activists have been demanding for kamaiyas freed last year.

“For the first season we tried to grow vegetables individually, but soon realised that dividing the small plot among ten owners was not practical. We also realised that as small producers it was difficult to find a market for our produce,” says Phulpati Chaudhari, president of the group. Instead, they decided to farm as a group. In the last season, they grew thousands of kg of onion, potato, tomato, cabbage, *karela* and beans. With economies of scale, the vegetables were easier to market and found willing buyers. “It was the first time I handled so much cash,” says an excited Jag Mohan Chaudhari, the group’s accountant.

The families don’t just have enough vegetables for themselves now, there’s also the increased cash flow which they urgently need. Sundari Chaudhary had nearly lost her eyesight to cataracts, and last year she could finally afford to have them treated. The children are eating better and all those under 15 go to school, compared to only literate person among their parents.

However, there are still problems, including the management of finances. Last year CCS helped them form a savings and credit group, Ekta Bachat Samuha. Each family is required to save Rs 20 a week, and send a representative to meetings. But for the last four months, the savings have been stagnant: none of the members has been able to put the money aside for their compulsory weekly savings. On average, a family earns about Rs 1,000 a week from the sale of vegetables and the daily wage work they find in Dhangadi bazaar. The savings book shows the families have Rs 8,000 between them, but there is no cash at hand, mainly because virtually all members have taken loans and haven’t started paying them back.

The other worry is the land itself: their three-year lease term is coming to an end, but the group is not confident their landlord will renew the agreement, and they don’t feel confident enough to negotiate with him. “Individually we are nothing. Collective farming is what is vital for us. If we cannot lease land, we will go hungry again,” Phaguram Chaudhary, secretary of the group, told us. Worse, they don’t even have ownership documents for the land their huts are built on.

The road ahead is rocky and uncertain, but these ten families are still proud that they have stuck together and achieved so much. An achievement that their thousands of newly-freed brothers and sisters can learn from. Despite the problems, the relentless sun, and temperatures in the area of 40 degrees, they each continue to take their turn watering, nurturing and harvesting the vegetables they have come to rely on. ♦

Free to be miserable



Former kamaiyas at a makeshift camp in Kailali.

When the government outlawed the kamaiaya system on 17 July last year, it would have done well to look to this group for lessons about farming skills, the importance of title deeds, and keeping promises. Resettling their lives away from the fertile fields of rich farmers who relied on them, has been as hard on the former kamaiyas, as was working in virtual slavery.

The government decision meant the kamaiyas were free from the obligation of *sauki*, the debt that tied them to the landlords. But because rehabilitation has taken so long and been so slow, the former kamaiyas have been forced to start from square one: They had no money to pay off their “debts”, now they have no money to get on with their lives. They’re not complaining about not being able to live in the huts they built on their landlords’ land, but they haven’t been provided with alternate housing arrangements. Farming is what they know best, but they haven’t yet been allocated land to farm on, or been trained in new skills that would help them get other jobs. In the

saturated labour market of the western tarai, that would be difficult even with training.

Tired of waiting for the government to allot them the 10 *katthas* (approximately 0.34 hectares) of land they’ve demanded per family many former kamaiya families from Kailali and Kanchanpur districts decided to force the issue in January. They began moving out of the 51 makeshift camps they were stuffed into and occupied undesignated chunks of government-owned land. They were careful not to encroach upon surrounding forests, not to chop down trees, or build their shelters on private-owned or otherwise contested properties. The ex-kamaiyas occupied a total of 1015 hectares.

This mass civil disobedience was to challenge the government to either help them resettle there permanently or provide them land elsewhere. Supporting activists promised to move in once each family had the 10 *katthas* (0.34 hectares), to help them start their new lives with programmes for nutrition, construction, healthcare, skill development and income-generation.

The Ministry for Social Welfare for its part, does not agree with the former kamaiyas’ demands: it promises only five *katthas* (about 0.17 hectares) and Rs 5,000 to each family. And even this paltry promise has not been kept. “Before the landlords cheated the kamaiyas, and now the government is violating their rights by not extending due support,” Mike Dottridge, director of Anti-Slavery International said in Kathmandu recently. Non-governmental help is also dwindling. Since the former kamaiyas are now scattered in various locations, donor agencies are finding it difficult to reach them with relief. “There is also no policy or understanding among the supporting NGOs and INGOs as to how effectively to provide aid to former kamaiyas,” says Ek Raj Chaudhary of the Backward Society Education, a grassroots group at the forefront to free and rehabilitate kamaiyas.

If things don’t move fast, the former kamaiyas in the Sumi Nala VDC will start to look positively lucky—through no effort of the government. And being “free” will mean being free to suffer, and be ignored.

- Hemlata Rai

Record climbs

It was a season of triumph, tragedy and tumbling records. Sixteen-year-old Temba Tsherhi Sherpa stepped on Mt Everest on 23 May to become the youngest climber ever to scale the summit. The schoolboy from Tashigaon, Rolwaling who lost five fingers to frostbite while attempting Everest from the south last spring made it up from the northern side this time. Temba, climbing with the International Everest Expedition, replaced the record set by 17-year-old French climber Bertrand Roche in 1990. Roche,



MIN. BAIKACHARYA

also a member of this International Everest Expedition, set another record this spring, when with his wife Claire, he paraglided from the summit of Everest (north side) to reach Base Camp in eight minutes. On the summit two hours after Temba was 28 year-old Lhakpa Sherpa, who become the first Nepali woman to climb the mountain from both sides. Lhakpa summited Everest from the Nepali side last spring.

If Temba was the youngest, 64 year-old American Sherman Bull became the oldest man to reach the top of the world. He was accompanied by his son Brad, and now there has been a father-son duo atop Everest. The Bulls reached the summit on 25 May. There’s more: 32-year-old Erik Weihenmeyer became the first blind climber to reach the summit, also on 25 May. The climber from Colorado followed the sound of bells to the top. The spring mountaineering season also saw the first successful expedition on Mt Lhotse Middle, 8,413m, from the west side, by a group of Russian climbers on 23 May.

But there was also tragedy on Everest. Four climbers, including Babu Chiri Sherpa, who holds the sprinting record up Everest (16 hours, 56 minutes) died on the mountain. An Austrian, an Australian and a Russian climber were other casualties.

Suspect craft

Fasten your seat belts, UML. It is now the main opposition’s turn to feel the heat in a suspect aircraft leasing deal, this one with China Southwest Airlines. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has found another jet-leasing decision, under comrade Bhim Rawal, a former UML tourism minister, irregular, and possibly corrupt. And the UML leadership does not like the manner in which the PAC, headed by Subhas Chandra Nemwang, reached their conclusion. Its standing committee was the first to react, saying it was “surprised” by the decision. But that, in turn, surprised KP Oli, a member of the standing committee and the PAC. Days later, Oli said he felt the party should respect democratic norms and adhere to the decision, which was taken by him and other senior party members, among others. What this boils down to is the tussle between Oli and UML general secretary Madhav Nepal, which has been simmering since the 1998 convention that elected Nepal to power. Oli is said to have more popular support, but Nepal controls the party ranks and neither side lets slip a chance to get at the other. The UML has formed a party committee to investigate the charge against Rawal, known to be a Nepal yes-man, and Oli wants to make sure this is not a ploy to absolve the accused.

Clean-up more garbage

It was a sense of shame that prodded Japanese climber Ken Noguchi to take up the task of cleaning Everest. He was struck when western climbers pointed out that although Japan’s economy was robust, its environmental ethics were pretty terrible. “When I climbed Everest in 1999, I realised a large amount of garbage had been left by Japanese, Korean and Asian expeditions,” says Noguchi, who came back with a clean-up expedition in 2000, and also this year. The 2001 Noguchi/Asia Qomolangma Cleanup Expedition brought down 1,600 kg of garbage from Tibet. But Noguchi is just not done yet. Next year, he hopes to collect more than 4,000 kg of garbage from the Nepali side of the mountain.

It isn’t only foreigners making the effort to clean up the mountain. Nepali Sherpas, paid by the Nepal Mountaineering Association, the Tourism Ministry and the Tourism Board, brought down more than 4,000 kgs from the mountain slopes this spring.

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Shut up, or shutdown



If the duration of the protests matters so much, can't we have a five-day relay bandh in which people in each development region take a day off to demand the prime minister's resignation?

Is it not rather unfair of us to be condemning political parties for organising shutdowns, especially after how that sustained series of sit-ins and strikes interspersed with sloganeering rekindled our democratic consciousness just over a decade ago?

The ruling Nepali Congress, the senior partner of the alliance that awakened us from our three-decade slumber, likes to brag about its bandh-free record after the restoration

of multiparty democracy. However, that tells you only half the story. The Kangressis have never been out of power long enough to be itching to bring the country to a halt at the slightest provocation.

As for the argument (Editorial, "Realm of the senseless", #44) that no bandh in the last seven years has been successful in achieving its main objective, maybe not. But seven years is too short to reach such a

profound conclusion on such a potent political instrument.

Let's face it. Without the spring shutdowns of 1990, could the country have dismantled the partyless edifice validated by a national referendum whose outcome even BP Koirala considered politically expedient not to question? Strikes are a time-tested formula for political fulfilment. Forget about new democracies like Bangladesh, where

the opposition has been setting new records in testing the elasticity of bandhs without allowing the country to snap. In the world's sole surviving super power, Bill Clinton used shutdowns to mount a successful comeback from the brink of irrelevance after Republicans seized control of both house of Congress in 1994. Clinton's showdown with House Speaker Newt Gingrich over budget allocations brought the entire federal government to a standstill for days. The impact: polls showed that Clinton would easily have won a third term in office if the 22nd amendment to the US constitution hadn't stood in the way.

Let's look at it from the point of view of the UML and other left groups. They insist they are forced by circumstances to blend their street action with periodic bouts of forced inactivity. Given the current political scene, they may not be wrong. With sparks within the governing party often flying to the point of rendering the opposition irrelevant, members of the shadow cabinet know they can't afford to stay in the dark for too long. So opposition parties join hands to craft a strategy to obstruct the entire winter session of parliament demanding the prime minister's resignation over a tainted aircraft deal.

The prime minister, true to his party's legacy of democratic socialism, tells his opponents to use constitutional methods to oust him. But even before the opposition

alliance can think of registering a no-confidence motion at the parliament secretariat, the prime minister issues a whip to ruling party MPs to vote in favour of the government on anything that comes up for a hand count.

Infuriated by this restriction on legislators' consciences, our comrades—freshly ditched by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party after the winter session is prorogued—fill Putali Sadak with mangled pieces of what used to be sidewalk railings to block the prime minister from entering his Singha Darbar office. The wily old man decides to test the will of the young and restless. Instead of helicoptering himself from Baluwatar to work (the way he likes to take those periodic day trips to Dharan) he chooses to drive straight through the barricades.

Now, you can't expect the agitated red brigade to pack up and go home. The stakes are obviously increased when half the UML central committee is taken into custody to watch the prime minister make a televised appeal for national consensus. True, a lot of people suffer from regular bandhs. However, this does not mean that they are in any better shape without them.

In deference to public opinion, however, organisers could perhaps try to fine-tune their action plan from next time. Remissions like the morning and evening curfew breaks might work. If organisers think it would be difficult to ensure that shopkeepers and consumers get back indoors in time, they might

want to hold bandh-eve public hearings on ways of making the shutdowns as people-friendly as possible. Once residents from Dhoka Tole to Patan Dhoka realise that they can participate in this democratic exercise without having to miss the headlines of the afternoon papers, the door to greater public participation will have widened a bit.

If the duration of the protests matters so much, can't we conceptualise something like a five-day relay strike in which people in each development region take a day off to demand the prime minister's resignation? Depending on how this works, we could contemplate holding 14- and 75-day stoppages for greater zonal, district and national effect. No one disputes the fact that the country loses a lot of money during these strikes. But wasn't that the refrain of the Marich Man-era *pratikar samiti*? We refused to listen then, and aren't we glad? Nepalis knew they had to lose something to gain something of value, which is precisely what the UML is reminding us today. So don't bill the UML for all those smashed windows and torched cars that are the by-product of this great lesson in civic responsibility.

A better idea would be to charge the Kathmandu-based embassies in direct proportion to the support they gave us while we were learning how to paralyse a political system that wouldn't let the people open their mouth. After all, the 30-year panchayat-multi party debate was reduced to this: shut up or shutdown. The people have long spoken. Let's not try to destroy the language that forced the world to listen to us. ♦

COMMENTARY

by NURU LAMA

Hope for a new Nepal



While in primary school, holding placards high above my head, I used to happily join public processions shouting: "*Hamro raja, hamro desh, pran bhanda pyaro chha. Hamro bhasba, hamro bhesb, pran bhanda pyaro chha.*"

Thus the sacred images of desh and naresh were scripted on my empty slate. In secondary school, I was encouraged to appreciate the visionary unification of Nepal by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, to be proud of brave warriors like Amar Singh Thapa and to remember martyrs like Shukraraj Shastri. Here the Buddha was born, here Mt Everest stood high. We went through the daily ritual of a patriotic song before class: "*Hatti boina datti ladne Nepali ko baani hunchha*". We smiled gleefully like the picture-perfect children from North Korean propaganda magazines. We knew we were the future karnadhars of Nepal because we were told so.

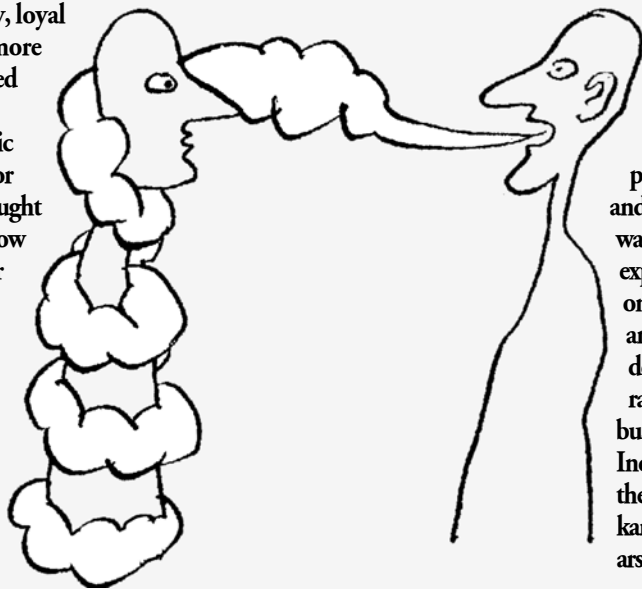
Everyday we were taught to be proud of Nepal. And I was one proud Nepali. I understood ours was an important country in the world because foreign dignitaries came to visit us and were 'granted audience' by the King. The aerodynamic vibrancy of our national flag was an impressive sight compared to the rectangular monotony of other flags. I knew the eternal flame of the Buddha was lit at Lumbini, that Shiva presided from the inner sanctums of Pasupatinath, and that Vishnu slept soundly on his serpent bed at Budhanilkantha. Even our geographical scale, "all" the way from Mechi to Mahakali and from the Himalayas to the tarai felt Asiatic. This was the land of powerful gods, brave people and beautiful places.

But all was not well. The devil lurked in the shadows. I grew up. The symbols of Nepali pride cultivated during my school years clashed with the stark realities of everyday Nepal. In the global scheme

I dream of a new Nepal that celebrates the people, communities and histories that make us a vibrant whole. A Nepal that concedes the mistakes of the past, understands our present dire situation and therein finds the impetus to progress.

of things, I realised Nepal was just another melancholic tale of a poor nation struggling to transition from a feudal, isolated past, chained by the inertia of family-based politics, administrative slack and caste-cultural hegemony. I understood that nationalism was a 20th century phenomenon, pronounced by the histories of colonialism. It was an idea, not a reality. Nepali nationalism was a Panchayati attempt to give meaning to the imperial victories of the Gorkha kings by exogenously introducing a common Nepali identity. I realised that the Sugauli Treaty was a charitable giveaway by the British who realized that the sturdy, loyal Gurkha recruits were more valuable than the rugged slopes they lived on.

The 1990 democratic reformation was casue for fresh jubilation. We thought a new era had begun. How mistaken we were in our hopes once again. With increased political jockeying at the top, pervasive corruption, bureaucratic negligence, and ominous Maoist rumblings in the western hills, the country still remains in



what feels like a primordial economic and psychological malaise, depleting life out of the citizenry.

I am a representative Nepali youth, once full of life, today full of 'fist and fury.' Without my asking I was given hope and pride, and today the same agents have, without my asking, robbed me of them. As a child, I too wanted to be someone, I too thought I could be someone. As a youth, I see only hopelessness and still waters—my attempts at finding a job, my dreams of providing a better future for my family washed away in the dirty waters of the Bagmati. A degenerative cloud of anger and despair hangs over my generation, punctuated by the thunder of bandhs after bandhs. Our Machiavellian netajis prey on our frustration and muscle. We are the walking-talking 'instant' explosives they can hurl onto their opponents, and when we explode we destroy pavement railings, inflame public buses and assault innocent Indian tourists. Yes, I am the 'cute boy' turned karyakarta, hooligan, arsonist.

The Indian dream is a house, a Maruti and a 'bahadur.' Beside my chaukidar brothers who make Indian families' dreams come true, I have sisters providing comfort in the "City of Joy", uncles fighting in the Indian Army, cousins laboring in Korean sweatshops and in-laws doing 'I don't know what' in the Middle East. My friends are proud that they fought for the British and not the Indians, are working in America and not in the Middle East. Instead of fighting against servitude, we argue the trivialities of who the better master is. Is it so difficult for us to accept our destitution that we continue to believe the chauvinistic rhetoric of our netajis, and read history as written in the textbooks?

Mt Everest may stand tall but I certainly have stooped. Once I believed in Nepal. Today, I question it. But even in my lonely, desperate moments, I tell myself "not all is lost." I remind myself of King Robert the Bruce's lessons from the unrelenting spider. I am glad not to be living in the false assurance of a textbook Nepal, gloating in narcissistic self-admiration or parading the Emperor's new clothes. Yes, I am your representative Nepali youth, wanting to build hope and pride in a new Nepal. I imagine a new Nepal that celebrates the people, communities and histories that make us a vibrant whole. I imagine a new Nepal that concedes the mistakes of the past, understands our present dire situation and therein finds the impetus to progress. Let us learn from the Buddha who taught us that real happiness comes not from ignoring the truth of our unpleasant reality but in accepting and overcoming that truth. ♦

Nuru Lama, 27, grew up in Phaplu. He recently graduated in economics from Harvard University and now works in New York.

Fight to the finish

In the Nepali Congress backrooms political intrigue gets more intense as Prime Minister Koirala decides to battle it out.

and the Armed Police Force (APF) to fight the Maoist insurgency. Koirala believes he got a clean chit from the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Although it did not charge the prime minister formally, the CIAA concluded that there was corruption in the deal to lease the Lauda Air 767 for Royal Nepal Airlines—which was obliquely approved by cabinet. So the stigma of graft is going to be a Girija legacy. Unlike the 1995 scam involving a European sales agent for Royal Nepal Airlines, where Koirala was implicated and cleared by court, this charge is likely to remain with him forever.

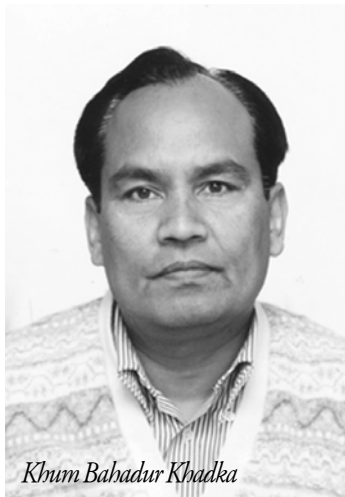
On 25 May, the CIAA filed charges against ten officials, including former minister Tarani D Chataut at the Appellate Court, Lalitpur. Directors of Royal Nepal Airlines, some senior managers and two Lauda officials are also charged. Chataut and one RNAC employee are absconding while others were picked up by police the same morning and taken to court. A distant cousin of Chataut, who is a member of the CIAA, is said to have tipped him off to avoid arrest. He is now in hiding somewhere in Kathmandu.

Some Koirala-aides felt the CIAA letter to the prime minister gave him a honourable way out, so he could resign without implicating himself. Among those advising him to step down last week—of course saying it was ultimately his decision—were deputy prime minister Ram Chandra Poudel, foreign minister Chakra Bastola, and finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat and other close advisers. One insider told us Koirala chain-smoked and drank endless glasses of tea while trying to decide. NC lawmakers Sushil Koirala, Govinda Raj Joshi, former minister Laxman Ghimere

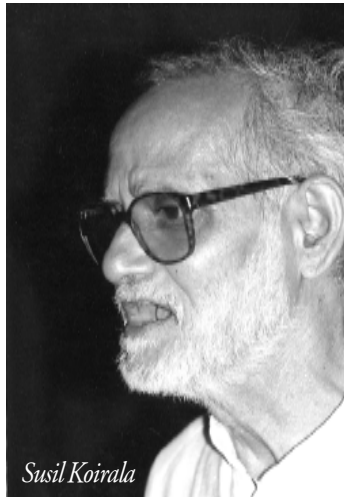
parliamentary elections two years ago, he became prime minister because he has the numbers within the party, and he was elected party president—why should he quit? Emboldened by such fervour, he is now in no mood to listen to any talk of resignation. What he is contemplating now is a major reshuffle of his cabinet to bring dissident Nepali Congress members back to the fold and turn his attention to holding the budget session of parliament—something that could be tougher. This is vital because it has to vote the money for his pet Integrated Security and Defence Programme (ISDP)



Sujata Koirala



Khum Bahadur Khadka



Sushil Koirala

advised him strongly not to resign. Badri Bahadur Karki, the Attorney General, told the prime minister there was no legal reason to step down.

We asked Sushil Koirala why he thought the prime minister should stay on. His reply: "He's been attacked from every side since the day he took office, he needs to be given a chance to govern. That is what a majority of the party workers said, not just us."

Defence minister Mahesh Acharya, who is quiet during meetings but seems to have the ear of the prime minister in private, was against resignation. Family pressure also counted: daughter Sujata,

nephew Sriharsh and sister-in-law Nona seemed to have been more concerned about jeopardised business interests if he resigned. Niece Shailaja, for her part, who was sternly against stepping down when Koirala wanted to some weeks ago because she did not see a credible successor, had no firm position this time.

Now that he has made up his mind to stay, Koirala's first order of business is to outflank critics within his own party by co-opting dissidents in his cabinet. At the forefront is Khum Bahadur Khadka whom he had summarily sacked in August, but is now taking back probably as a senior

minister. The decision also smacks of an embattled prime minister acting defensively to shore up his numbers to prevent a mutiny. "This is not the Girijababu we remember," a minister present at the Baluwatar consultations told us. "He was bargaining, cajoling with former rivals just to cling to power."

Koirala must be thinking he'll sort out the inter-party wrangling with a reshuffle and then turn his full attention to the opposition UML to get them on board for the budget session. If he gets an all-party support for the ISDP and the APF, he may then step down. The main question now is: will anyone let him? ♦



BINOD BHATTARAI

You have to give it to the man. He never gives up, does he? Ignoring the counsel of some of his closest political allies, and following the advice of his relatives and cronies Girija Koirala has once more opted to stay put and fight it out. And this time, even he seems to realise this is a fight to the finish. Koirala has convinced himself it is nothing less than democracy that is at stake. Speaking privately to friends, he sees a huge conspiracy by the extreme right and left to unseat him, weaken the party and take the country back to the days of dictatorship. Koirala says the Nepali Congress won a majority in



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BIZ NEWS

Gas

If you're still having problems purchasing Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), you'll be interested in knowing this: LPG will soon cost more. The Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) is working on a new pricing scheme for LPG, to account for the price hike recently announced by the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC). LPG sold by the IOC now costs \$375 per metric ton, up from \$280 on 13 October last year, when the NOC raised the price of LPG from Rs 465 to Rs 550 a cylinder. The NOC says it was losing about Rs 102 per cylinder even at the Rs 550 selling price. With the new increase from the Indian side, this will now be in the region of Rs 165. Madan Raj Sharma, the NOC's executive director, says that without subsidies we would have to price LPG at Rs 750, a move that would need to be approved by the government. The NOC buys 3,700 metric tons of LPG from the Indian corporation every month.

The NOC has also not yet worked out a system to ensure that LPG meant for domestic use does not end up in minibuses and three-wheelers that run on the gas. On average, a 14.2 kg cylinder of gas—enough to meet the cooking needs of a household of five to six persons for a month—powers such vehicles for three to four days. About 1,000 such vehicles plying the Valley's streets have pushed the monthly LPG demand up by about 250 metric tons.

Mind the gap

Government spending has continued to increase, taking the budget deficit up by 35 percent to Rs 8.41 billion in the first nine months of the fiscal year (until end-April). The increase is mainly due to salaries and benefits for government employees and security costs. The government spent Rs 44 billion in the last nine months, of which about 29 percent went to meet regular expenses and just 14 percent was spent on development activities. According to the Central Bank's monthly economic report, exports have continued to grow—by 21.5 percent in the first three-quarters of this fiscal year—but have slowed down compared to the 37.6 percent growth attained in the same period last year. The bank also reports drops in Nepal's traditional exports—readymade garments, woollen carpets and jewellery. Pashmina sales in end April were Rs 6.28 billion but Nepal Rastra Bank says exports have declined since. Balancing the slowdown in exports, imports grew by just 6.9 percent to Rs 85.11 billion, compared to the 28.6 percent growth in imports in the same period last year. Foreign exchange reserves at the end of April were Rs 102.87 billion, of which 79.4 percent was convertible currency.

Budget 2001-02

The national budget is the newest casualty of political instability. Parliament did no business after remaining in session for 57 days starting 8 February, and because the situation is basically unchanged, it is uncertain if government will be able to get new spending approved any time soon. Government sources say if things work to plan, the budget session will begin in the middle of this month. But that is no guarantee that the budget will be approved before the new fiscal year that commences in mid-July. If it cannot be put through, the government will be forced to go back to borrowing money for regular expenses, and development programmes will remain on hold until the budget bill becomes law. This could take up the entire first quarter of the new fiscal year and bring all development programmes to a standstill.

Food for thought

Agriculture production has slowed down, owing mainly to unfavourable winter weather and low agri-product prices. Growth is expected to be about three percent, down from 8.4 percent in the last fiscal year. The Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives expects paddy production to increase by about 4.6 percent to 4.21 million metric tons. The maize yield is projected to grow by 2.7 percent to 1.5 million metric tons, while that of wheat, the other major crop, is expected to drop by 2.2 percent to 1.2 million metric tons. Millet output was also down by 4.2 percent. The decline in wheat production is attributed to the unusually dry winter and farmers' unwillingness to use electricity to pump water for irrigation because agricultural product prices have remained low throughout the year. Among cash crops, potato production is expected to increase by 5.6 percent to 1.3 million metric tons and sugarcane is expected to grow by 5.1 percent to 2.2 million metric tons. Fruit and vegetable production are up by 9.8 and 10.6 percent respectively.

Indian currency scare

Central bank sources say they're having problems with Indian currency: the bank is wondering what to do with all the Indian Rupees it holds, and the Indian currency that is in circulation and hidden away under the mattresses of Nepalis. Indian currency circulates openly not only in border townships but also in major urban centres in the inner hills. Commercial banks shy away from buying IRs because re-exchanging it at the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) can take up to three months. Sources at currency exchange counters, who are required to ask customers why they're buying or selling IRs, say people either want to keep cash in Indian currency or are selling money they "had at home." The NRB holds about Rs 20 billion in Indian rupees, of which Rs 4 billion is invested in Indian treasury bills, and another Rs 500 million with the Reserve Bank of India under a stand-by agreement for trading. Even government institutions like customs and hospitals accept the currency, and sources say it is impossible to gauge how much Indian currency is actually circulating.



Veggie Mayos

Himalayan Hygienic Snax and Noodles (P) Ltd, the makers of Mayos, has launched a new vegetarian brand. Mayos is now available in two flavours: chicken and vegetarian, produced only after washing and cleaning the machines to ensure purity. Mayos is an undertaking of the Khetan Group in collaboration with Thai President Foods, Thailand. Veggie Mayos is priced at Rs 11 a pack.

COMMENT

by VIJAYA GAJANANDA VAIDYA



Needed: Nepali values

At a time when the country in such social and political turmoil, we may need to stretch back and derive support from our historical and cultural roots. We may need to find definitions of democracy and governance that are based more on our own values. Are the values of a western social order suited for us? Is there such a thing as a Nepali value system?

This is obviously a contentious issue. Freedom and choice are universal values. And we did experiment with a political system "suited to the soil" which didn't work either. But is there something in the Nepali psyche that needs a different degree of social order than elsewhere? The point I am trying to make is this: Nepali values may favour strong government with efficient and honest

to design laws and monitor government functions in a synergistic campaign towards long-term growth. The present discretionary, ad hoc and politicised decision-making is hobbling development and economic progress. To break out of this vicious cycle the country needs transparent and accountable government and this can happen with the correct application of democratic norms, checks and balances. Fairness and rule of law need to be guaranteed, so that efficient, honest and visionary leaders are rewarded at election time.

Here, the role of the leaders of political parties is pivotal. They must come forward to build the institutional foundations of good government. They must help clarify, aggregate and legitimise various interests within



MIN. BALACHANDRA

Nepali values may favour strong government with efficient and honest governance. We may need them to ensure the national unity required for economic modernisation.

governance. That could be the pre-requisite to ensure national unity required for economic modernisation.

"Nepali values" implies social, economic and political characteristics that our leaders have to articulate based on shared values which are identifiable and distinct, and which transcend national, religious and ideological differences. These cultural values are based on ideals that have evolved in Nepali society since the kingdom was united, they have social and political characteristics that are distinct to the Nepali nation. But do these values really transcend ideology, culture, religion and will they help or hinder the social and economic transformation that Nepal needs?

The first problem with the thesis of "Nepali values" is precisely the ethnic, religious, linguistic diversity in Nepal's multi-cultural milieu. The second is the question of whether there is a correlation between such values and economic growth. This theory takes its cue from the argument for "Asian values" put forward by Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohammad which argues that economic prosperity hinges on a strong government that is accountable and honest, and when individual freedoms are second to social responsibility and collective rights. But the "Asian values" argument that western-style democracy is bad for economic growth is at best ambiguous.

Ad hoc

One could also argue: isn't it this very Nepali value system that lies at the root of the cronyism, corruption and lack of accountability afflicting us? The cause for Nepal's malgovernance and economic non-performance may lie more in the institutions, the systems of property rights and commercial law as well as the government's macro-economic policies.

The conclusion then seems to be that there is no direct correlation between the type of government and rapid economic and social development. What is important is whether leaders are accountable and concerned about the country's development. It is the quality of governance, not the type of regime that seems to dictate the pace of economic development. A more efficient use of private and public institution could result in improvements in income distribution accompanying economic growth. It will be the strength, quality and freedom from political interference that will support sustainable and more equitable development. Nepali legislators will need the support of experts

society. They must help secure channels to articulate diverse views and muster public support for policy initiatives. They must be the consensus-builders providing continuity and stable policies, not the ones polarising the polity, as is happening now.

Fragile

At present, Nepali political institutions remain fragile and unstable, which in turn feeds social upheaval and turmoil. The public has started to view parties as a part of the problem and a threat to democracy because parties have never demonstrated sensitivity to their concerns. One of the most destructive offshoots of this is corruption and nepotism. Corruption cannot be excused through cultural determinism, there is no society that has a monopoly on honesty, or plunder. Transparency in government comes from institutional checks and balances, and as we have seen from Hong Kong and Singapore, from a vigilant and visionary leadership that derives moral and political legitimacy from the public perception that it is accountable to the citizenry.

Weak government is the result of a weak application of the rule of law, inadequate protection of individual rights, and leaders corrupted by vested interests and criminal forces who bankroll their elections. The state through its national budget could subsidise representative political parties through an independent commission so they will not be beholden to political contributors.

Notwithstanding our cultural diversity and confused polity, I think Nepal can still build a shared value system and a common principle to promote democratisation and good governance. Nepal's strength lies in its nature—a soft state with its inherent resilience and adaptability to change. Still, given the present perversion of our polity through corruption, opportunism and outright pillage, there is an urgent need to instil a sense of responsibility and commitment on our leaders. The need is urgent since a government more responsive to local needs and one that can efficiently deliver basic services is long overdue. The people have shown they are not prepared to wait any longer. ♦

Gajananda Baidya is with the Vaidya's Organisation of Industries and Trading Houses, and he contributed this comment for Nepali Times.



MIN BAIRACHARYA

Kathmandu's apartment craze is catching on as a new surge in housing complexes tries to keep up with demand.

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

If necessity is the mother of invention, then the denizens of Kathmandu may finally be looking forward to an end to their housing woes. For too long, the Valley has coped with explosive urbanization, malignant, unplanned growth of improvised concrete structures that added floors to accommodate the influx. Zoning laws were flouted, building codes violated, safety sacrificed.

Now, housing estates and modern apartment complexes are at last making their way in. For now restricted to the upper middle class, the trend is already showing signs of trickling down to low-income housing as well. And Kathmandu is following the South Asian trend that makes an apartment a bigger status symbol than a bungalow. Already, surprisingly affordable apartment complexes are coming up promising a "European lifestyle".

Building a house can be one big headache, from getting the raw materials, hiring an engineer and contractors, getting the necessary permits (through underhand methods if necessary) fixing up water, electricity and phones. All this can be avoided by paying the little extra for an apartment. Hassle-free housing seems to be the new slogan. And since there is a demand, the supply has suddenly come up in the past five years.

Last year, when Ansal Choudhary Developers came up with the idea of Kathmandu Residency, some scoffed. A joint venture of the Choudhary Group of Nepal and Ansal BuildWell, Ansal Choudhary Developers was the first to launch an apartment based housing project in Nepal. With a total of 180 apartments with price ranging from Rs 900,000 for a one bedroom apartment to Rs 1.9 million for a three-bedroom one, the apartments were surprisingly affordable. People stopped scoffing and started taking the trend seriously.

Kathmandu Residency will be completed by October next year, and Ansal Choudhary has already started a new housing project named Mount View Residency at Harisidhi outside Patan. Spread over nearly two hectares of former paddy fields, Mount View Residency is a townhouse concept with Duplex and Individual Homes. Aimed at the middle to upper income brackets, the price of a duplex home is Rs 1.9-2.2 million, while an individual home is Rs 2.6 million.

Launched in mid-May, the apartment complex has attracted hordes of prospective home buyers. "We get up to 60 visitors a day coming to inspect the houses," says V Rajgopalan, technical head of the project. "More than half the apartments have been booked so far."

One visitor at the Harisidhi complex is Basu Shrestha, a businessman who lives in Kathmandu's inner city Indra Chowk area. He says: "I want to take my family out. It is getting too congested to live in the city." Others inspecting the interiors are happy that there is now an alternative to buying expensive property, supervising unreliable labour and fixing the utilities. Does this presage the age of suburbia in Kathmandu? Some would hope not, but it will surely make urbanization slightly more planned. The only real estate development so far had been targeted at the super-rich in areas like Bhaise Pati with its large plots for villas.

Given the Nepali penchant for copying anything that is successful, urban planners hope other developers will copy this model and take the pressure out of inner city Kathmandu. Eyeing the potential bonanza that Ansal Choudhary will make, others are already joining the bandwagon. Kantipur Development Pvt Ltd is preparing to start a housing project at Balkumari, Thimi with 107 single homes, 16 2-bedroom apartments, and 14 3-bedroom apartments. The price of a single bedroom home is Rs 2.2 million and that of two- and three-bedroom apartments is Rs 1.4 million and Rs 1.6 million respectively.

Suraj Apartment at Tangel and Priyanka Apartment at Chabahal are the two complexes already in operation in Kathmandu. Half of the flats of Suraj apartment have been sold while rest are on rent. At Priyanka, all 16 flats are on rent ranging from Rs 14-16,000. Most tenants are businessmen from outside the Valley. Other luxury apartments and flats cater to expat clients and are out of the reach of most Nepalis.

Although demand is growing, many Kathmandu inhabitants have not outgrown their initial reluctance to living in flats. And despite the relatively low cost, it

is still out of reach for the salaried class—since there is really nothing for less than Rs 1 million. The two-bedroom apartment of Stupa Houses at Budhhanagar is one of the few low-cost apartments, but even these are at Rs 700,000. "We targeted civil servants, and we will offer financing in a tie-up with the Sanchaya Kosh," says

Stupa's Jitendra Shakh. Ansal Choudhary, for its part, is collaborating with the Agricultural Development Bank and United Finance for housing loans.

The private sector has stepped in where the government has failed. And the government has not even been able to fulfil its role of regulator. It has yet to introduce necessary regulations even though parliament passed the Joint Apartment Ownership Act in 1997. There is also no separate building code for apartments, and no rules on safety features like fire-escapes being implemented.

The apartment boom has also perked up the real estate market which was going through a slump. The price of small plots have risen in the past six months, and part of the reason is the demand for apartment complexes. But the main reason is still the Sanchaya Kosh's announcement of housing loans for civil servants which has brought a surge in new construction in Kathmandu Valley. "It was an encouraging year for the construction

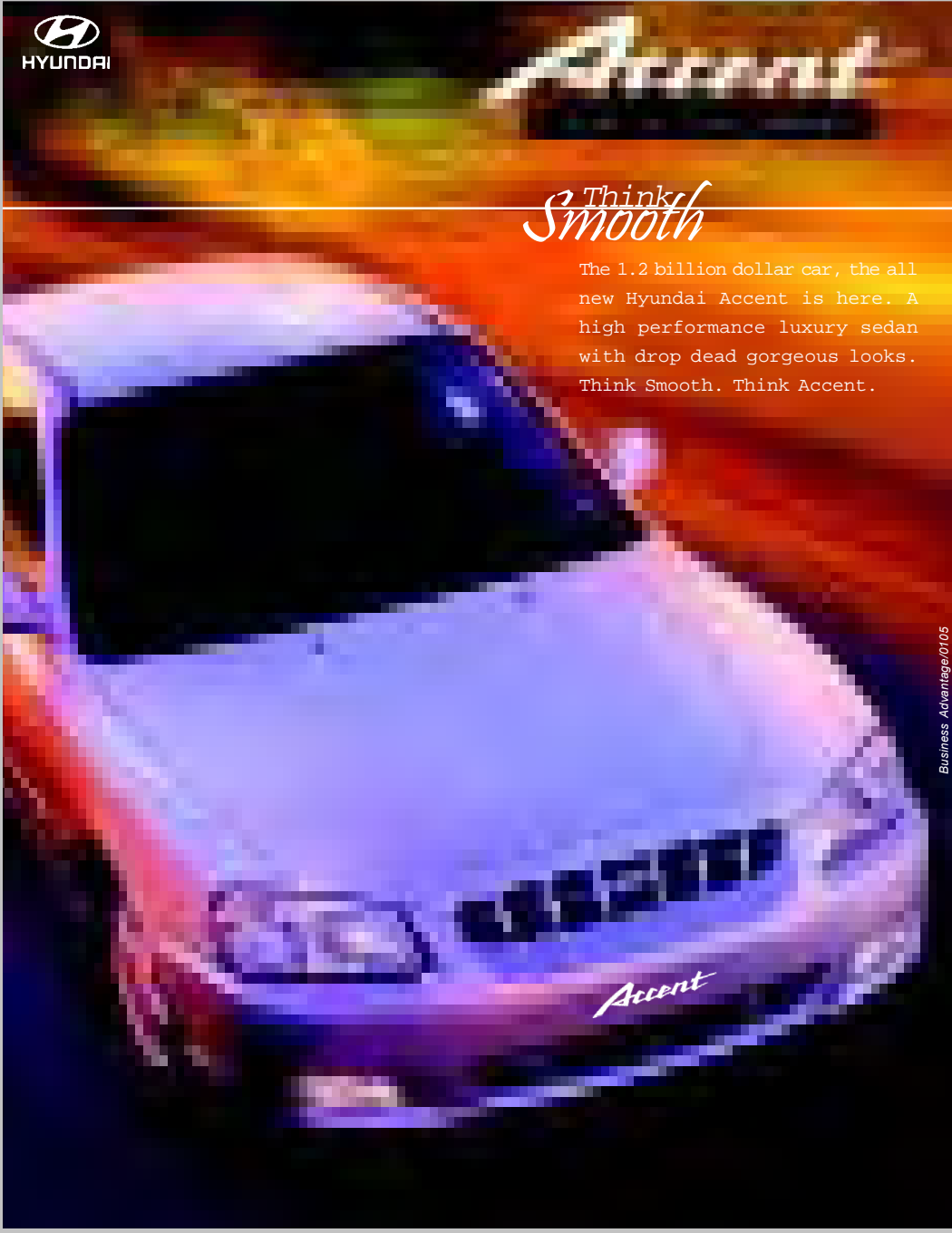
entrepreneurs," says Ram Prasad Maharjan, chairman of Construction Material Entrepreneurs Association. The price of per thousand bricks has soared from Rs 1800 to Rs 2900, and Maharjan says it may even top 3,500. Brick kilns have not been able to meet the increased demand. Cement and steel rods have also seen a rise in price

"The demand for cement has increased by 50 percent this year," says Bimal Chandra Poudel of the National Trading Center. As the Nepali cement industry is unable to address increasing demand, the import of Indian cement has risen. Due to this huge demand, Indian cement importers have hiked the price by Rs 11 per sack.

In the last fiscal year, Kathmandu Metropolitan City has issued Building Construction Permission for 2,347 houses. This year, the number crossed that mark by April. It is estimated that 3,000 construction permits will be issued in Kathmandu and 1,000 in Patan. ♦



MIN BAIRACHARYA



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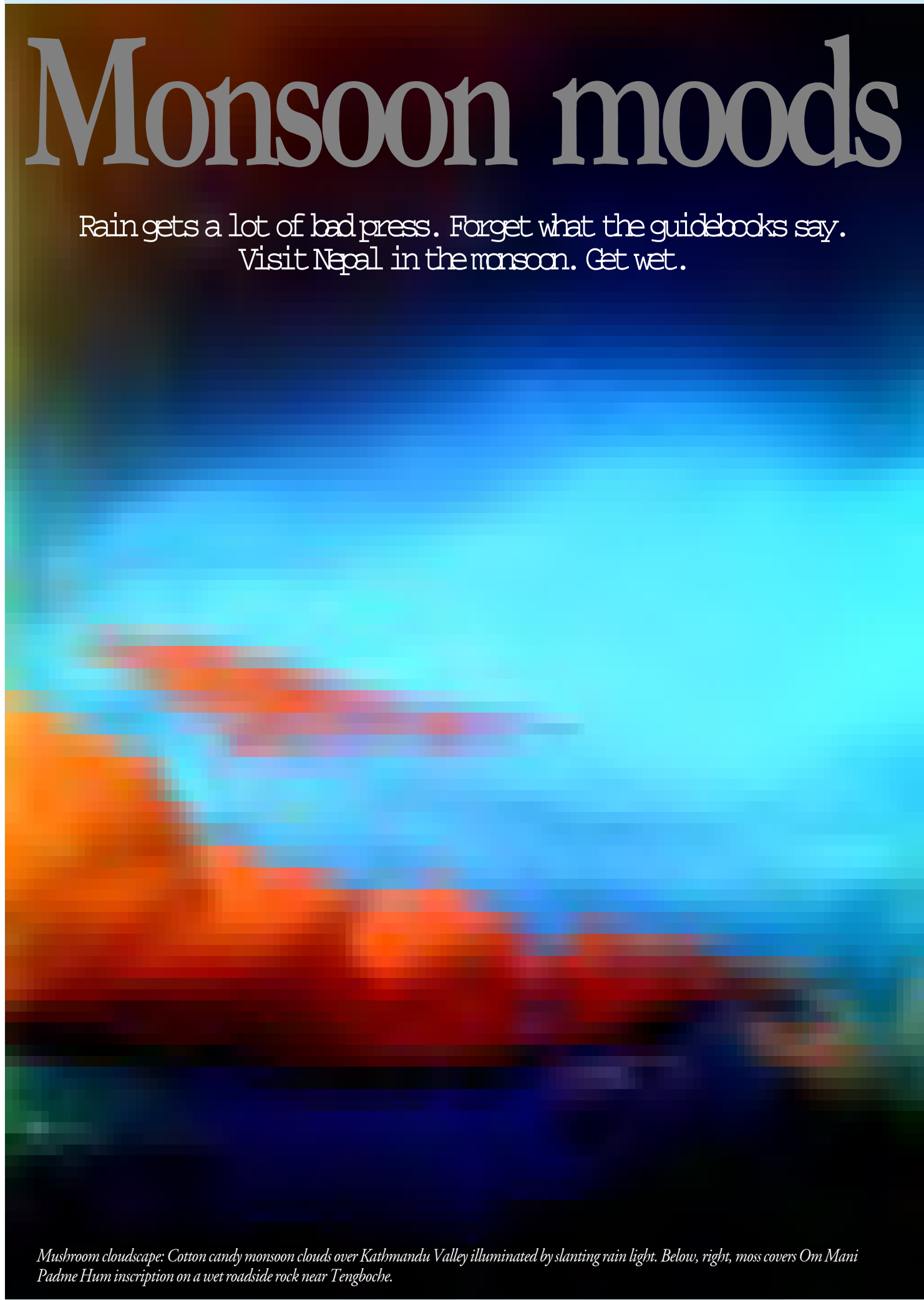
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MIN BAIRACHARYA



Mushroom cloudscape: Cotton candy monsoon clouds over Kathmandu Valley illuminated by slanting rain light. Below, right, moss covers Om Mani Padme Hum inscription on a wet roadside rock near Tengboche.

PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT

Monsoon moods

Rain gets a lot of bad press. Forget what the guidebooks say. Visit Nepal in the monsoon. Get wet.

KUNDA DIXIT
t rue, rivers are swollen, there is a danger of landslides, highways are blocked, flights cancelled and in the tarai there are floods. But rain is life. More than 90 percent of the farms in Nepal are rain-fed. Weather forecasters on Radio Nepal sound upbeat when they report “rain throughout the kingdom”. The GDP growth rate for the subcontinent is dependent on the timely arrival of the monsoons, stock markets take a plunge if there is a delay.
It is time we discovered our country in the rainy season. Time we wet our dry and dusty souls with water from heaven. In a week or two, we will witness that annual meteorological miracle that makes prevailing winds over Nepal suddenly make a u-turn. Moist and warm air from the Bay of Bengal will travel up, deflected by the Himalayan foothills where it will billow up and condense into thick wads of rain. For three months in a year, the Himalaya from Kashmir to Assam act as a gigantic atmospheric dam to store this water vapour. The mountains are such an effective barrier that the Tibetan plateau to the north is left literally high and dry in the rain shadow.
These weeks before the arrival of the monsoon are hot and muggy. Rivers run dry, fields are parched, and farmers stage elaborate frog weddings as rites of rain. The pre-monsoon showers are catadysmic events. Pumped by the heat, huge convection currents send cauldrons of cumulus rising vertically into the atmosphere, sometimes more than 50,000 feet. Up there in the stratosphere, the jet stream smears their tops into wild angry cobra heads. On one pre-monsoon afternoon, I once watched the entire Ganesh massif dwarfed in the shadow of one of these cauliflowers of moisture penetrating the edge of space. The convection system rose out of the Buri Gandaki Valley to ride on flashing neon legs of purple lightning. From high up on a ridge above Dhunche we watched transfixed as the afternoon sun was blotted out, and the snowy slopes of Langtang Lirung lost their light. It suddenly became dark and silent like an eclipse. Animals, humans, and even the thirsty plants waited nervously as a veil of violet rain advanced from the west.
The wind picked up, the poplars bent like bows: their agitated leaves

giving the quickening air a voice. Plastic bags, startled birds and leaves were snatched by the flying yellow dust. The storm edged closer until the flash and crash became simultaneous. The roiling blue-black clouds overhead muffled the guttural roll of the thunderbolt as it travelled away over the mountains into Tibet. Another, more delicate din approached as the hailstones hit corrugated roofs of the houses in the bazaar below. By evening, the pyrotechnics were over, the storm had moved over to the east briefly framed in a double rainbow over the holy ridges of Gosainkunda. The varnished leaves dripped, the tree trunks sweated, the wet water buffalos were shiny.
If a pre-monsoon thunder shower is an opera, then the arrival of the monsoon itself a few weeks later is a Smetana symphony. You can smell the rain long before it actually arrives. From the pass above Pokhara, the clouds move about among the Annapurnas like the little curly puffs you see on thanangka paintings. They ride the westerlies across azure skies, and suddenly stop, hesitate, and turn around. That change in high-altitude wind direction precisely between June 10-15 over central Nepal every year is the first sign that the monsoon will soon burst.
By evening, the air suddenly turns humid, a smell of warm wetness swells up from the valley below. A yellow moon rises from behind a range of mountainous clouds to the east. They glow in the moonlight, and the inside of the clouds are incandescent with silent lightning. By nightfall, there is a sudden sharp coolness as the moisture turns into mist, and the mist in turn into a fine gauze of rain. The Nepali vocabulary has at many onomatopoeic words to describe different kinds of rain: at midnight it turns from drizzly *sim-sime* to heavier *darkane* and by early morning it is a torrential *musal-dhare*.
There is nothing like the simple pleasure of lying dry and drowsy inside a sleeping bag on a bed of straw below a shingle roof of a Nepali farmhouse while the monsoon beats down outside. You can analyse the individual sounds of rain drops falling on the trees, tapping on the stone tiles above your head, gathering in the gutter to splatter on the street below. When you wake up, you find it is still raining through the mist. The ridge

Just singing, dancing in the rain..

DESMOND DOIG
On one of my earliest visits to Nepal I walked across the border. I came with a Hungarian artist who lived in India, her companion a French artist-adventurer, a Nepali male dancer friend and a small dog of no particular breed.
Together we were visiting places where Gautama the Buddha had lived and preached and died. We ended the pilgrimage where we should in fact have begun it— in Lumbini. The lady artist had insisted that we travel humbly and cheaply like true pilgrims. So we carried nothing but our paints and a change of clothes which consisted of

little else than a *kurta*, a *lungi* and a pair of slippers. Even the slippers were a recent acquisition as we had begun the journey barefooted.
The monsoon was expected to thud down on Kathmandu any day: the Indian plains had been scorching and still, as they are just before the monsoons. I like to think we were the first hippies who hit Nepal. Sans hash we looked the part, so that even Boris Lissanevitch was briefly hesitant to take us in. There were few rooms at The Royal Hotel and its growing reputation had to be protected. Boris suggested in our interest, and I suspect his own, that we share a single room which turned out to be one quarter of the original ‘Number One’. Gone were the cherubs and

the blue ceiling. Gone too the wallpaper and, alas, the great loo. We’d once again arrived in time for Yak Tails and we sat being eyed rather suspiciously by the other guests through a long evening and the first real dinner we had had in weeks. Even Boris tired when Elizabeth, the Hungarian artist, kept urging us to have one more before going to bed well after midnight. She herself didn’t drink. At last Boris had the bar closed and more or less ordered us to bed.
When we got to the door of our room we understood Elizabeth’s reluctance to retire. She stood outside and said piteously, “I have never done this before.” Which was remarkable considering we had shared train compartments, rest houses

and space under trees together for at least a month. But psychology was at work. A bedroom was a bedroom was a bedroom, and those four beds placed rather close together did suggest orgy. Elizabeth overcame remorse by taking a quick dash for her bed and bundling in under blankets, clothes and all.
We were soon asleep. At some ungodly hour we were wakened by the most frightful din. The skies over Kathmandu were exploding. The monsoon had arrived. But where was Elizabeth? It was the Nepali dancer who saw her first and shouted, “God, she’s gone mad.”
There in the courtyard with apparently nothing on was a figure dancing in the pouring rain. Continuous purple

lightning made her seem strobe lit, so that flash, flash, flash there was Elizabeth leaping, gyrating and spreadeagled against the night. For a while she ignored our entreaties to come in and then all of a sudden was inside splashing cold rain on us all. Her French companion’s loud complaints were literally drowned by a bucket of freezing water brought from the loo by Elizabeth and emptied over him.
Kathmandu does strange things to people the way Shangri-la did to the old, the young and to those in love. ♦
(Excerpted with permission from *My Kind of Kathmandu*, Harper Collins, 1994)

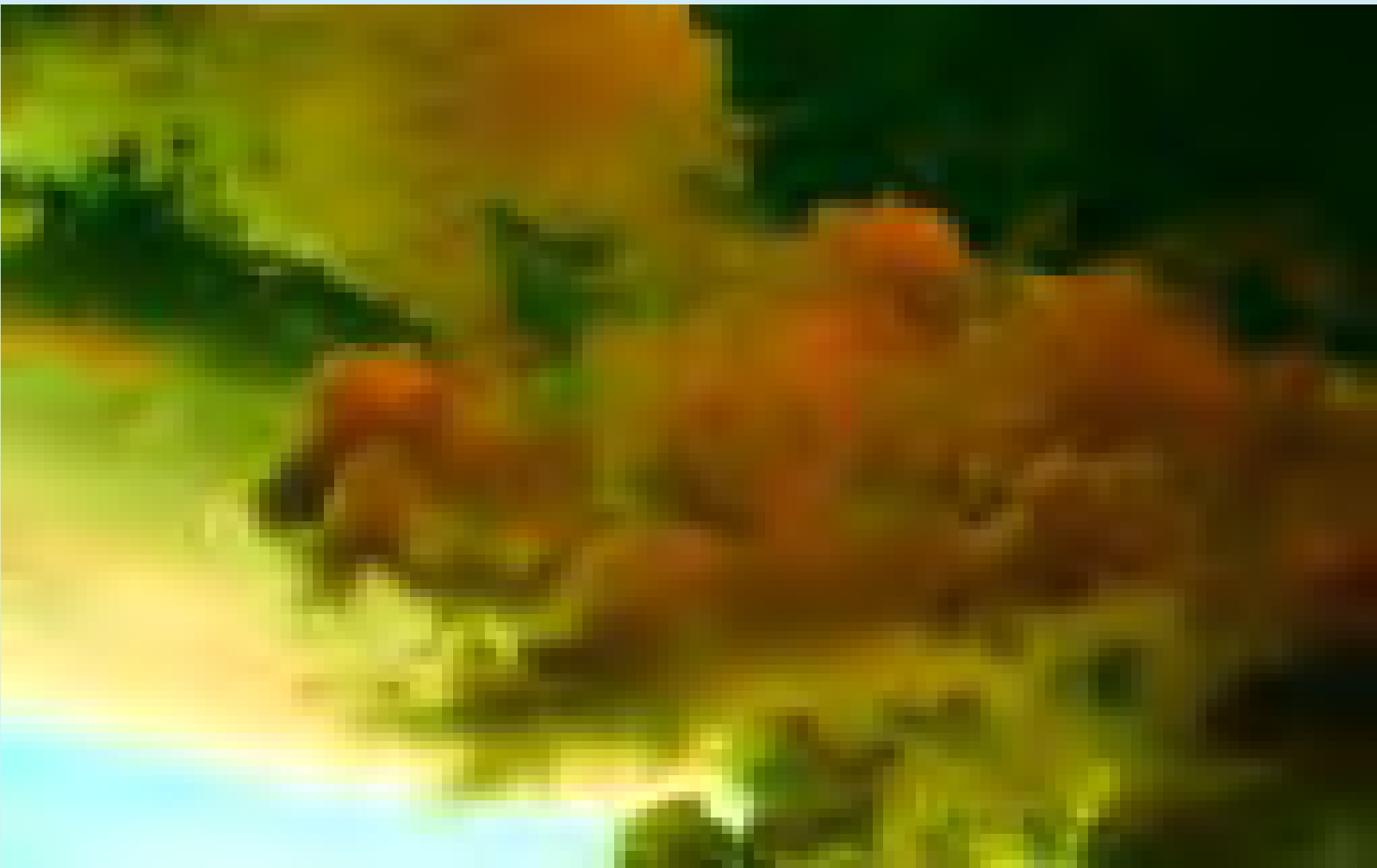


track has by now turned into a torrent. There is commotion on the trail as men and women shrouded in plastic and bobbing umbrellas get their hoes ready to move down to the paddy terraces for the transplanting. Forget what the guidebooks say. Visit Nepal in the monsoon. Get wet. See the denuded slopes burst with foliage as nature gives Himalayans one more chance at regeneration—another hope to set things right. Watch Kathmandu Valley reclaim the green and turn emerald once more. Gaze down from the Jiri highway at three thousand vertical feet of staircased rice fields mirroring the gray sky. Today, most tourist areas are accessible by air even in the monsoon. There is a chance your flight will be cancelled a few days in a row, but you will get there. You gather at the domestic terminal in Kathmandu as the rain thunders on the metal roof. Drenched helicopters squat grounded on the tarmac like wet dragonflies. But, surprise, the flight to Syangboche is called.

The pilot ducks, leaps and sidesteps the monsoon stratus. The Sun Kosi, swollen brown, plunges eastwards in a series of rapids. Red scars of recent landslides maul the slopes near Rumjatar. Lamjura is closed up by clouds, so we fly around it, sometimes grazing the steep flanks as goats and cattle flee for cover in the high meadows. The mountains get steeper, meaner. Long tendrils of waterfalls tumble over cliffs and dissolve into mist half-way down in their journey to the valley below. The tops of mountains disappear into a dark ceiling of cloud.

Up here in Syangboche the air is more humid than Kathmandu. The next morning Mt Everest, the Lhotse-Nuptse wall, Thamserku and Kongde gather around like old friends. They look fresh with a coating of new snow, but the snowline has receded up their flanks—exposing wet shoulders that look like they are carved out of ebony. The difference in the monsoon is the greenery. The flowers are in full bloom, alive with butterflies and birdlife. The grass creeps up right up to the moraines and the snowline.

Everywhere, there is the sound of falling water: big waterfalls that thunder right across the Imja valley, little ones that gurgle behind every



bend in the track to Tengboche, the deep drone of the Bhote Kosi relentlessly cutting ever deeper gorges. These rivers are older than the mountains and they have been slicing through the rising rock for 60 million years. Hydro-powered waterwheels churn energetically spreading the prayer about the jewel in the lotus in all directions. Monsoon is the time when the trekking trails mostly only have Nepalis on them. There is not a backpacking tourist in sight.

By ten in the morning, the first clouds are chugging up the Imja Khola—the forerunner of an ocean of clouds that can be seen lapping at the ridges below Namche in the distance. They move up silently through the junipers, soaking the swaying lichens with droplets of condensation. By eleven, when we are safely inside the Ama Dablam Lodge, the rain starts falling steadily in that marathon-like pace of nonsense, long-term rain. It falls continuously into afternoon, all

night and stops abruptly at dawn.

Mountains are like the centrefolds of girlie magazines. After a while, you wish they had some clothes on. Mountains look infinitely more interesting when there are clouds hovering around them. And the sight of the first rays of the sun illuminating the summit seracs of Kangtega would look incomplete without the wisp of pink plume moving across them. Clouds give an added dimension to the rock and ice—the dimension of movement, of flight, and of matter in its vapour state. And because they are visible so fleetingly, the monsoon makes you treasure the rare glimpses.

By late August, you notice that the relentless rain is ebbing as the monsoon starts to lose its momentum. The water buffalos start making their treks up from Hetauda to the slaughter houses of Kathmandu for the post-monsoon Dasain feasts. Many of these animals are now crammed into lorries, but some still trek up the trail

that once used to connect Kathmandu Valley to the plains. In the village of Chitlang overlooking the Kulekhani Lake they gather for their last day on the trail. Tomorrow they have to make the climb up to the Chandragiri Pass at 8,000 feet before the steep descent down to Kathmandu Valley on the other side. By the time we enter the oak forest the next afternoon, the clouds move in. The buffalos are single file, disappearing

into the misty undergrowth. They wear straw slippers so their hoofs don't wear off on the stony trail. The rain comes down in fat drops, and that is when the leeches decide to ambush the convoy. Suddenly they are everywhere, dropping down from the lower branches, flailing out from wet rocks, sucking the buffalos without mercy. At the pass where we rest while the buffalos straggle past, I pick out fifteen leeches from inside one of

my shoes. The buffalos are faring worse, they are bleeding from their snouts and eyelids. In the black-and-white world of a monsoon forest the crimson streaks on the buffalos look like fluorescent graffiti.

By mid-September, the sun returns. The dasain revelries begin, the buffalos are massacred at the Kot. The sky is navy blue and dotted with kites. At Kathmandu airport, the tourists start arriving again. ♦



Shangrila



More than 125,000 email users in Nepal may be hit by a 500% increase in a fuzzy government tax.

Æ from p. 1

BINOD BHATTARAI

To gauge just how desperate the government is, consider this: the tax office wants a 500 percent increase in Tax Deductible at Source (TDS) on payments that internet service providers make to rent bandwidth and other Internet services. This would eat into the slim profit margins that ISPs have because more than 70 percent of their cost goes to renting the bandwidth and Internet ports. ISPs say the TDS would put them out of business overnight, because for all practical purposes they end up paying the TDS. In addition like any other business ISPs already pay 25 percent corporate income tax and there are invisible payments private firms have to make at various government departments to get their files moving.

So what we may be about to witness is another successful, all-Nepali, all-private initiative being taxed out of business because the government can't balance its books.

"Bandwidth to us is what raw material is to a manufacturing industry," says Shyam Kumar Agrawal, Managing Director of Worldlink Communications. "Even makers of alcohol and tobacco are given concessions on raw material imports, but they are taxing us another 15 percent on bandwidth. This is absurd."

Sanjib Raj Bhandari of Mercantile Communications who introduced email and Internet to Nepalis agrees: "It doesn't make sense to remain in business when the government takes over 30 percent of your gross revenue, excluding income tax. We may as well close down." In January Mercantile had announced plans to take Internet services to 25 districts, but has put it on hold. And even its news portal, nepalnews.com would be hit.

Nepal's 13 ISPs employ over 500 people, most of them in white-collar jobs. Because staff turnover is high in the industry, they continuously train new entrants who often end up in some of the best IT companies in the world. Nepal has an estimated

25,000 email and Internet accounts, with more than 125,000 users.

ISPs were required to pay a three percent TDS on payments they made for bandwidth, Internet port and fax facility rentals three years ago. They lobbied hard to convince the government to waive even the three percent, arguing even that was too much because the market was very competitive and they ended up paying the tax (for the foreign provider) without being able to book it as a cost.

The tax office says because foreign companies ultimately pay the TDS the ISPs are only making a fuss. However, the foreign companies don't because most countries selling bandwidth don't have double taxation avoidance treaties with Nepal and so they cannot claim deduction. Secondly, even if there was a treaty, they would not pay the 15 percent because the industry is very competitive and works on very small margins of one or two percent. And instead of bothering to do business with Nepali companies, they would

rather look for buyers elsewhere.

Apparently, the government saw logic in the ISP's argument for getting rid of the three percent because last year's rulebook did not specifically mention the tax on service providers. But the tax collectors did not think so and managed to force ISPs to pay three percent anyway. The rule remains unchanged, and this year the tax office has come up with a new interpretation: ISPs, like companies that pay commissions, royalty, management fees and technical service fees to external parties, would have to cough up 15 percent TDS. Compare that to insurance companies that pay 1.5 percent, and airlines that pay three percent.

The ISPs say they are not even mentioned in rules, so they are not liable to pay. But as compromise they say they are willing to pay the three percent they paid last year until the dispute is settled. ISPs met finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat to discuss these options last week. Sources say that even though the minister was sympathetic to their arguments, the tax department needs the tax to meet its revenue target and has stuck to its demand. Hence the deadlock.

An ISP pays a fee as bandwidth rental. Nepal's 13 ISPs use the facility from different companies and all, including the public sector Nepal Telecommunication Corporation which also runs its own ISP, pay for using the service. NTC pays \$17,000 each month for about two megabits of bandwidth. Private companies pay anywhere between \$15,000-\$30,000 depending on the bandwidth they use. It is not clear if NTC pays TDS on all of its external payments, even though it says it does, something that the tax office does not confirm.

An ISP pays anywhere between Rs 700,000-3.5 million for

registration and licensing, for a period of five years, depending on whether it uses its own V-SAT or not. Then there's another six percent of revenue they give—four percent as royalty and two percent to the rural telecom fund. And unlike, say, the 10 percent Telecom Service Charge NTC charges its customers, ISPs cannot add or pass on these to clients.

These charges on ISPs contrast with the government's ambitious goal of taking information technology nationwide under the new IT policy. Surendra Chaudhary, the Science and Technology minister likes to say that Nepal missed out on the industrial and the green revolution, and it cannot afford to miss the IT revolution. All that now sounds like empty rhetoric to IT entrepreneurs. After visiting India's IT hubs last summer even Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala found out that it takes a token IRs 1 to register an ISP in India and they pay a six percent sales tax which is passed on to the user. Now it looks increasingly like one hand of government destroys what the other hand tries to build.

ISPs are already paying almost as much as traders, cigarette or alcohol manufacturers in up-front taxes. Besides there are other mismatches: Internet technology changes almost every minute, but the government does not allow IT companies to depreciate capital goods by more than what it allows regular industries. The government's tax rules are also heavily skewed against information technology: a hard copy encyclopaedia has no tax, but an encyclopaedia on CD has 22 percent payable in levies and taxes.

Of the 13 ISPs, only seven are actually doing business, some of the others are said to be looking for someone to buy them out. Unless

they have the economy of scale of the larger companies, there is just too much of a tax burden already. "If they were making as much money as the government thinks they are, why should the ISPs be closing shop?" asks Rajesh Lal Shrestha, Managing Director of Infocom. The company is one of the few new ones that have managed to get a foothold in the industry. "It is a killing proposition, thought-less and irrational," Shrestha says of the new TDS proposal. "To stay in business we would have to increase rates by up to 25 percent and usage would drop."

If that is so, one may as well ask why then have the companies not closed shop and invested elsewhere? Many are forced to continue because being a service industry, they affect customers directly—in terms of cancelled addresses and are forced to remain in business. "Our profits are in the range of 4-5 percent (without 15 percent TDS) and because we've already invested so much in the business, we cannot just close down," says Agrawal.

The tax office says it wants to make the royalty uniform to avoid confusion on TDS deductions, and until the law is changed they have to collect payments. Puskal Upadhyaya, Director at the Tax Department thinks the problem can be solved. He told us: "If it is a serious problem, the ISPs have to come to us and explain the nature of the business and we can agree on a separate TDS for the coming year. If royalty is high that can be settled because we don't want to kill any industry as we're made out to be."

Fine words. But it doesn't seem to instil too much confidence in the ISPs. "We just cannot pay 500 percent this year," says one. ♦



HEART CENTER

FOR THE HEART OF THE NATION

HEART CENTER is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing medical services to the poor and needy. We have a state-of-the-art medical facility with the latest equipment and a team of highly qualified medical professionals. We are currently seeking donations and volunteers to help us in our mission.



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Where do you want to be?



or here?

or here?

or here?

The third way wave



The last century was rough on simplistic ideologies of left and right. Socialism had its day in court, and was found wanting. The Great Communist experiment is virtually over (save for a few holdouts, such as Cuba and North Korea). The ideology of the right, as represented by the Washington Consensus of neo-liberal, market fundamentalism, wasn't much more successful, even if its failures go unacknowledged. The last half-century has shown that while development is possible, it is not inevitable. Countries most

successful at it—those of East Asia—followed policies markedly different from the Washington Consensus. Before the financial crisis of 1997, East Asia experienced three decades not only of unprecedented growth, but also of unprecedented reductions in poverty. Out of these successes arose a “Third Way” between socialism and market fundamentalism. Ironically, America, long a zealous advocate of market fundamentalism, developed according to its own “Third Way.” US industry grew behind tariff walls. From the first

telegraph line between Washington and Baltimore, constructed by the Federal government in 1842, to the modern Internet, from agricultural extension services in the 19th century to military related research in the 20th and 21st, new industries were promoted through a quiet, market-oriented, industrial policy. There is, of course, no single “Third Way” applicable to all countries and situations, but a multiplicity adapted to each country's social, political, and economic circumstances. But these “third ways”

The time is ripe for a new Third Way consensus: not higher GDP, not increased income for the few, but the creation of democratic, equitable, and sustained growth.

- share much:
 - They take a *balanced* approach to government and markets, recognising that both are important and complementary. Market failures are a fact of life, but so are government failures. Neo-liberal ideologies assume perfect markets, perfect information, and a host of other things, which even the best performing market economies cannot satisfy.
 - Neo-liberals worry about excessive government, but weak government impedes growth because weak states cannot provide law and order, enforce contracts, or ensure a sound banking system. It was too little regulation—the capital and financial market liberalisation foisted on East Asia by the IMF and US Treasury—that led to financial crisis in 1997. The question should not have been *deregulating quickly*, but developing the *right* regulatory framework.
 - Public policy should work to improve markets and government.
- One exciting experience of my time in the Clinton White House was helping spearhead Vice-President Gore's “Reinventing Government” initiative, where techniques and policies were developed to enhance the efficiency, efficacy, and responsiveness of government agencies. Today, in virtually all dimensions, from responsiveness to telephone inquiries to the costs of transactions, the US social security administration beats almost every private insurance company.
- Equality matters. Older theories

taught *trickle-down economics*: that the best way to help the poor is “to grow the economy.” Growth required inequality because the rich would save more, and do a better job of investing. But the poor may not benefit from growth, or may have to wait too long, unless growth is accompanied by anti-poverty policies. Long-term growth in East Asia has demonstrated that egalitarian policies *aid* growth. Indonesia exposes the danger of ignoring these concerns. IMF-inspired policies in Indonesia led to a massive depression, then to the elimination of food and fuel subsidies when unemployment was soaring and real wages plummeting. The riots that ensued were predictable, and predicted. Recovery from the resulting devastation, capital flight, and erosion of confidence will take years. Economics can never be separated from social and political concerns. Economic theory and the evidence underlying these precepts developed over the last quarter century remain disputed. It may no longer be politically correct to ignore the poor, and few nowadays openly advocate trickle-down economics. But behind the new rhetoric lurk the same old neo-liberal policies of unthinking liberalisation and privatisation. *Done the right way*, as part of the Third Way, these can help the poor. Done mechanically, they increase poverty and inequality, and stymie growth. Has privatisation delivered growth in Russia? A few oligarchs garnered billions, but by stripping assets rather

than creating wealth. Russia's capital market liberalisation led to vast capital flight, not the promised flow of investment. As part of the IMF's structural adjustment programs, liberalisation was supposed to move workers from low to high productivity jobs. In all too many countries, however, it moved them from low to zero productivity jobs—unemployment. How could it be otherwise, when IMF policies led to interest rates of 10 percent, 20 percent or higher—rates at which job creation would be problematic in any business environment. The problems of Britain's rail privatisation and California's electricity deregulation have stripped bare the dangers of neo-liberal policies in even the best circumstances. The time is ripe for a new Third Way consensus, beyond the neo-liberal Washington *pensée unique*: a balanced view of markets and government, a refusal to confuse means (like privatisation and liberalisation) with ends, and a broader conception of those ends: not higher GDP or increased income for the few, but the creation of democratic, equitable, and sustained growth. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

(Joseph Stiglitz, professor of economics at Stanford University, formerly Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers to the Clinton Administration, and Chief Economist and Senior Vice President of the World Bank.)

End of history in Hollywood

ED RAMPRESS IN LOS ANGELES

Hollywood's latest blockbuster, *Pearl Harbor*, seen by many as a historically flawed effort with questionable racial politics, is yet another in a line of films that entertain at the expense of historical fact. The US Defense Department gave extensive support to *Pearl Harbor* before its Memorial Day weekend opening, which honours America's war dead. The movie is advertised with what look like Second World War military recruiting posters and the company splurged for a \$5 million premier aboard a US aircraft carrier at Pearl Harbor Naval Base. Disney's efforts to accurately portray history, however, have flopped. The historical inaccuracies in *Pearl Harbor* are legion: for example, the radar installation that spotted incoming Japanese Zeros is depicted indoors—it was actually on a mountaintop. African-American sailor Dorie Miller, played by Cuba Gooding Jr, did indeed shoot at Zeros, but he is shown firing an anti-aircraft gun; in reality he used a different weapon and, unlike in the movie, did not have a confirmed hit. In its three hours, *Pearl Harbor* never fully explains why Tokyo struck this American military base: US embargoes of oil and other raw materials was one of the factors that prompted Japanese militarists to conquer Southeast Asia. But to do so, Imperial Japan had to deliver a knockout blow to its main obstacle, the US Pacific Fleet. After the air raid, Yamamoto (correctly) expresses fear that Japan has “awakened a sleeping giant,” but the movie never reveals the source of his anxiety—US aircraft carriers that escaped destruction at *Pearl Harbor*. The movie also ignores the fact that the 7-8 December 1941 foray was part of aggressive action stretching from Hawaii to the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Shanghai, the most comprehensive one-day offensive ever. Such historical revisionism is not uncommon in Hollywood. A *Los Angeles Times* article in March on Harrison Ford's upcoming controversial *K-19: The Widowmaker* notes: “In recent years, Hollywood has been criticised for films play[ing] loose with the facts when telling stories of real-life personalities and events.” *K-19* is one such movie. Russians related to the sailors who died in the 1961 Soviet nuclear sub disaster are concerned that the upcoming film portrays their relatives in false and unflattering light. And a campaign questioning the factuality of 1999's *Hurricane*, about a black boxer wrongly imprisoned, may have derailed Denzel Washington's chance of winning a Best Actor Oscar. Last year's *13 Days* is another Hollywood film with a dubious basis in historical fact.

Disney's new *Pearl Harbor* continues a Hollywood tradition of rewriting history.



The feature on the Cuban missile crisis never reveals that Cubans felt compelled to protect themselves with a nuclear deterrent because the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed 1961's Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. In the movie, communist expansionism, and not Washington's provocative, interventionist foreign policy, is the reason for Soviet nukes in Cuba. *13 Days* and *Pearl Harbor* underscore today's US military policies. With its theme of death-from-the-skies, *Pearl Harbor* can be seen as propaganda for the National Missile Defense System. Both films warn that America must be eternally vigilant from endless enemies who might rain destruction down on them from the skies. Asian-Americans launched an education campaign to counter fallout from the film. Imperial pilots in the film are more-than-human, otherworldly conspirators exercising great bushido bravado, skill, and treachery. *Pearl Harbor* doesn't clarify that agents conducting espionage in Hawaii prior to the attack were not Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJA), a sore point with AJAs, falsely charged with sabotage and imprisoned en masse during the Second World War. And although Pearl Harbor is named after a place and set in Oahu, there are virtually no Hawaiians in the film. Hawaii itself is missing in action. The film mostly depicts Oahu's military bases, which the Pentagon gave Disney permission to use for months for nominal costs. These oversights exist even though onscreen ethnic imagery is a hot topic in Hollywood—a recent televised Bugs Bunny retrospective excised cartoons with racist caricatures of Blacks and Indians. For *Pearl Harbor*, Disney consulted Daniel Martinez, National Park Service historian at the memorial to the USS Arizona battleship at the Hawaiian naval base. Martinez noted at least 50 factual errors in the original script, but believes flawed history is better than no history: “You've seen the movie, now see the real history.” ♦ (Gemini)

Ed Rampell is a film historian and co-author of the new book *Pearl Harbor in the Movies and Made In Paradise: Hollywood's Films of Hawaii and the South Seas*.

Liquid gold

A US entrepreneur is hoping to strike liquid gold by selling his urine over the Internet. Kenneth Curtis, owner of Privacy Protection Services, says he started selling urine sample kits on his website after he grew tired of drugs testing at work. He supplies urine contained in a small pouch with tubing, which can then be taped to the body. Buyers who operate it properly can use it without being noticed by someone monitoring a urine test, Privacy Protection Services claims. The \$80 kit also includes heat packets so the user can warm the sample to body temperature. But Curtis, of Hendersonville, North Carolina, has now become locked in a court battle with State Law Enforcement Division agents, who arrested him last April claiming he was selling the urine kits to cheat on drugs tests. He faces a combined maximum sentence of eight years in jail and a \$17,000 fine if convicted. An unrepentant Curtis has told says: “If you can't sell urine, what can you sell? I don't sell drugs, I sell urine.” (Ananove.com)

Eating at the White House

The White House announced this month that it will serving genetically modified foods at official government functions. The move is intended to head off criticism by environmental and consumer groups that the altered foods are unsafe. “You really can't tell the difference,” said White House chef Daniel Arreido, who recently replaced long-time Clinton cook Walter Scheib III. “It may be genetically altered but it tastes just the same.” Arreido said the first family already consumes milk containing bovine growth hormone. The White House plans to debut the new food items at a state dinner next month for French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. According to Arreido, the menu for the dinner will include such delicacies as pan-seared, genetically altered super salmon and Texas-style corn pudding made with Star Link corn. “These are traditional Texas recipes,” Arreido said, “but with a special twist.” Not everyone in the Bush administration supports the new policy, which is said to have been the idea of Vice President Dick Cheney. Just last weekend, Environmental Protection Agency chief Christine Todd Whitman voiced concern about the safety of the altered foods while appearing on the weekly political talk show Meet the Press. “This administration plans to keep a watchful eye on these products,” Whitman said. (The Nation, Bangkok)

Reinventing Beijing



ANTOANETA BEZLOVA
IN BEIJING

In their zealous bid to win the hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games, Chinese leaders may be pushing for more changes in Beijing than the city can take without surrendering the last bits of its ancient identity. Beijing is now touted to become a financial capital, adding a glitzy Wall Street-style financial area at the foot of the ancient imperial city. Authorities want to reinvent Beijing's image from that of a prohibitive old city of emperors into one of a futuristic metropolis. They are evicting 20,000 families and pulling down thousands of old courtyard houses to make way for its showpiece Wall Street—104 ha next to the city's second ring road, which was approved by the State Council as the capital's financial centre in 1993. Over the past eight years, the city government has financed and completed the first third

of the project. A regiment of skyscrapers has risen on the site of the former maze of courtyards and old lanes in Xicheng district. Authorities say that so far, some 300 firms, including state banks, insurance and securities companies, have settled in the finance area. The second phase, which will include office buildings, five-star hotels, convention and exhibition centres, will take another five years to complete. "With China's pending accession to the World Trade Organisation, the state will open the financing industry wider to the outside world," says Cao Zengsen, executive chairman of the Beijing Xicheng District Government where the area is located.

But China already has two bustling metropolises—Hong Kong and Shanghai, where most of the country's financial and business transactions are concentrated. Beijing cannot mount a serious threat to either

In their bid for the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese want to turn Beijing into a futuristic metropolis and business centre.

of them because foreign banks are not allowed to do local currency business in the capital. Despite the cluster of state-level financial institutions in the Beijing finance area, it has attracted only three foreign banks which have set up representative offices here. Even within the capital, the government-approved finance area faces stiff competition from the Central Business District in eastern Chaoyang district where most of Beijing's foreign companies and their expatriates are located. But Xicheng district officials brush aside doubts about the future of Beijing's Wall Street. "Beijing Finance Street is the only place in Beijing that is devoted to financial business," argues Cao Zengsen. He says that in the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), the place was known as Jincheng Fang or Gold City Lane because many gold and silver workshops were there. Adds Liu Jian, deputy governor of the Xicheng district: "Today all of the state-level financing bodies are located in the area. If foreign companies want to make money, they will move in here because their domestic partners are here."

City officials could make a faux pas to mtach that of Chairman Mao Zedong's. He altered Beijing's core irrevocably, saying the capital of a workers' state needed to be an

industrial stronghold as well as a political and cultural centre. Ten years after the Communist takeover in 1949, there were 700 factories and 2,000 blast furnaces belching soot into the air. Today, there are more than 1,000 industrial enterprises in the city, employing millions of people. In 1957, the old city walls with their turrets and battlements were torn down. Since then, most historic buildings have been razed. Ancient temples, tombs, courtyard homes and narrow lanes have been bulldozed to make way for high-rise apartment blocks, highways and shopping malls. Ironically, the goal of making Beijing the host of 2008 Olympics has made authorities quietly reverse Mao's policies. Over 700 industrial plants are to be pushed out of the city in the next three to five years. The city government has also announced plans to invest nearly 100 billion yuan (\$12.5 billion) in a huge clean-up campaign, aiming to reduce air and water pollution and plant 40 percent of the urban area with trees, all by 2007. But conservationists say the enormity of the destruction to the city is irreversible. While the clean-up campaign might improve the city's image enough to host the Olympics in seven years' time, it would be difficult for athletes and guests to find a cultural environment that really represents an ancient capital. ♦ (IPS)

Tintin in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the Peoples' Republic of China

BRUSSELS - Tintin, the intrepid boy reporter of comic strip fame, was at the centre of an embarrassing diplomatic incident last week after politically correct Chinese translators renamed his adventures in Tibet *Tintin in Chinese Tibet*. Known as simply *Tintin in Tibet* since 1957 when it was first published in the west, the translating "error" has caused untold problems for the Belgian publisher Casterman, which has just negotiated a groundbreaking and lucrative deal to bring the adventures of the quiffed boy journalist to China for the first time. The overly orthodox translation also caused a good deal of awkwardness for Belgium's foreign minister, Louis Michel, a self-styled champion of democracy, who was in Beijing last week to toast the historic deal only to discover that he had walked into a diplomatic minefield. "I am not a translator or a publisher and I don't speak Chinese," was all the minister would say, urging the matter to be settled privately between Casterman and their local partners, the China Children Publishing House.

But Casterman signalled last week after a hastily convened meeting in Beijing that it would be insisting that the word "Chinese" be dropped from all future editions. The publisher also sought to play down the seriousness of the incident. "We are interested in the Chinese market but we are not interested in getting involved in politics," Casterman's Willy Fateur said. Fateur added: "We have asked our partners to rectify the album, not for political reasons but simply to defend the authenticity of the original and they have agreed." Fanny Rodwell, the widow of Tintin's Belgian creator Herge is reported to be a personal friend of the Dalai Lama and she did not attend the launch ceremony in Beijing for that reason. Chinese censors have already ensured that the most populous country on earth will be deprived of *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* (anti-communist) and *Tintin in the Congo* (too racist and imperialist) although 21 of the original 23 books will be available officially for the first time. Pirated albums of Tintin have circulated for the last two decades but they are of such poor quality that Chinese readers have been under the impression that Tintin (Dingding in Chinese) was asiatic rather than from Brussels. (Guardian)



COMMENT

Thailand punches below its weight

In the past 100 days, the Thaksin government has punched below its weight on foreign policy. Instead of matching or going beyond its weigh-in status and capability, the government is content with pathetic diplomacy under the amorphous banner of "forward engagement". Worse has been the government's enthusiasm for a nationalistic agenda which dashes with the policy objectives outlined by the Foreign Ministry. Certainly, that position has won Thai Rak Thai a lot of domestic support. But it was painful for the government to find out that the foreign community did not buy it. After Thaksin's disastrous speech at a UN meeting in Bangkok recently, which shocked the Bangkok-based diplomatic community, the government took a series of damage-control actions and came out with the message that Thailand would remain open to global investment and trade. That demonstrated the imperative of external exigencies, which have shaped Thailand in more ways than one since the Western colonisers knocked on its door some 150 years ago.

To move forward, Thailand needs pragmatic domestic policies that will strengthen its social fabric and democratic foundations. At the same time it requires forward-looking policies that boost the national interest and elevate its position in international contexts. Somehow the external part of this equation has been missing or misplaced in the first 100 days. No one can deny that the dominant issues of the coming decades for Thailand will include drugs, refugees, migration, disease, environmental degradation and international crime as well as democracy and human rights. Thailand cannot deal with all these issues alone. To be fair, the government has been intensifying its anti-drugs efforts both domestically and regionally. China's willingness to call a summit meeting to discuss drugs among the Mekong countries was laudable. Like many other pledges, it must be judged in a long-term perspective. But unfortunately Thai foreign policy has failed to maximise the country's newly found leverage in international relations. The Thaksin government has chosen to dwell on traditional issues and zero in on neighbouring countries. The government wants to strengthen trade and economic opportunities with neighbours who are less developed but rich in natural resources. So there has emerged the not-so-new concept of economic policy, which puts the emphasis on economic imperatives rather than political and social ones.

Here lies the government's biggest pothole. Take the issue of human rights and democracy for which Thailand has been fighting for the past five decades. It is only in the past decade that we have enjoyed the fruits of this long struggle. Political reform since 1997 has created a new domestic environment with increased political participation from non-governmental and civil-society organisations. This element used to be part of the country's diplomatic posture: foreign-policy outlook then reflected domestic development. It is incomprehensible why this government is constantly in a state of self-denial about democracy and human rights. These values are not make-believe norms implanted by the West. Ironically, the government views this hard-won creditability as a liability. Thailand's recent voting in the UN Commission on Human Rights is a big



Thaksin's first 100 days have not done much for a forward-looking foreign policy.

disappointment. Bangkok decided to go for a non-action vote against the US-sponsored resolution to condemn China's human-rights violations. It could have abstained, which was the position it took on a similar resolution on Cuba. That way Thailand would not have alienated either side. It was understandable that the Thaksin government voted the way it did, given the circumstances and excellent ties with China. But the voting also shows the government's true colours: it does not care about the issues in the hearts of the Thai people. This sentiment is being reinforced by a proposal currently under consideration to withdraw from the UNHCR, to which Thailand got elected last year on the Asian roster. Somehow the government believes the policy of appeasement and denunciation of human rights and democracy are requisites to improve ties with neighbouring countries. The ongoing Thai-Burmese squabbling shows otherwise. If the Foreign Ministry decides to pull out from the UNHCR, it will do irreparable damage to the Thailand's international position and reputation and trustworthiness. It will lose friends in liberal democracies that have been helpful in the country's social and economic development over the past decades.

Thailand applied to the UNCHR because it had confidence in its democracy and protection of human rights. Others countries might join the commission for the self-serving purpose of defending their own dismal human right records, but Thailand wants to share its experience in nurturing and strengthening human rights with the rest of the world community. The Thaksin government can take credit for bringing new thinking into Thai politics and problem-solving in the domestic arena but definitely not in foreign policy. In the age of globalisation, only a foolish nation will punch below its weight. ♦

(Editorial in The Nation, Bangkok)

UNICEF rapped for HIV report

NEW DELHI - The portrayal of an Indian caste as being inherently given to prostitution, in a government report on HIV/AIDS funded by UNICEF, has drawn condemnation from human rights and women's groups. UNICEF has asked the Human Rights Commission in central Madhya Pradesh state (MPHRC), which carried out the study *Caste-based Prostitution in Madhya Pradesh*, to withdraw the report. "The concept of such a caste-based survey is repugnant to human rights and democratic thinking, being premised on a belief that there is something intrinsic to the caste which makes women prostitutes and men pimps," said Brinda Karat, general secretary of the All-India Democratic Women's Association. Karat pointed out that the 80-page report was "replete with shocking generalisations", like one that said 50 percent of the women of the Bedia community were HIV-positive. "There are no substantiations for such statements nor any details of the studies conducted, the number of people interviewed, or the details of the questionnaire," she said. The Bedia community has demanded withdrawal of the report.

This is not the first time a publication to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS has offended the sensibilities of a particular community. Last year, Abhijeet Das and his wife Yashodhara, founders of the well-known NGO Sahyog, narrowly escaped being lynched by a mob in the Himalayan town of Almora for suggesting in their pamphlet titled *AIDS and Us* that incest was rampant in the region. Such incidents have led to growing public scepticism about the rather well-funded programmes to fight HIV/AIDS even as the government is steadily cutting funds for a tottering public health delivery system. Human rights groups have slammed the government for flaws in its vertical, anti-HIV programme funded mainly with a \$544 million World Bank loan. India's health minister, CP Thakur, defends the programme, but accuses UN agencies of "misreporting facts and creating confusion," especially by putting out estimates and projections that there were nearly four million people living with HIV in this country of one billion people. "In the Indian context it is difficult to estimate the exact prevalence of HIV because of the varied cultural characteristics, traditions and values with special reference to sex-related risk behaviours," he says. (IPS)

A suitable prince



MIN BAIRACHARYA

Kishore Nepal in *Naya Sadak*, Sunday, 27 May

Preparations are underway to celebrate the 31st birthday of the heir to Nepal's throne, Crown Prince Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. With this royal birthday around the corner, people's attention is focused on the crown prince. People are asking why the crown prince is unmarried at this age, and whether his future as the heir to throne is in danger.

This is not an uncommon worry for the Nepali people, who have a lot of faith in and respect for the royal family. Crown Prince Dipendra is perhaps the first member of the Nepali royalty to break tradition and not be married even at 31.

The Royal Palace is also concerned about the Crown Prince's marriage. But many do not know where the crown prince's heart lies. People close to the crown prince speak of two women he has an emotional relationship with. According to them, one is a childhood sweetheart, while his relationship with the other began when he was older. "It might be that the crown prince is finding it difficult to choose between the two," jokes a palace

employee, adding, "But he does not support bigamy." Crown Prince Dipendra is romantic in nature, and he loves to joke and be open. His professors say he is uninhibited and has the poetic talents of his grandfather, the late King Mahendra, although his poems have not been published yet. Some people say the crown prince is against parliamentary democracy, but in reality he supports it wholeheartedly. He wants the Nepali people to have social discipline and responsibility.

The crown prince is also very studious, his favourite subject being Nepal's geography. He does not read a lot of fiction but devours non-fiction. He also painstakingly reads all the major newspapers. Crown Prince Dipendra also engages in discussions about how to boost the nation's economy. He often quotes *slokas* from the Gita during discussions, but has a vision for the future.

The crown prince usually likes to dress in informal and colourful clothes. His favourite is a brown daura-suruwal, says a source close to him. According to him, the crown prince is very conscious of the Nepali *dhaka topi* and if he particularly likes one, will wear it until the colours fade.

Crown Prince Dipendra's most gentlemanly quality is that he never leaves if someone is speaking to him, even though he is often constrained for time. He is only satisfied once the discussion ends. Although he is very interested in matters of governance and state administration, he does not wish to see the monarchy heading the politics of the country. He maintains his stand that the monarchy must play a major role in social development. The enthusiasm he displayed in the SAF Games is proof of his belief.

Another professor close to the Crown Prince says Dipendra views his grandfather, the late King Mahendra as the biggest "communist with a crown". He does not believe any of the communist parties are real communists, except the extreme leftists. The crown prince likes to talk with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and admires his wisdom and ability to be light-hearted even at the most serious times. His relationship with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is, however, just cordial.

Crown Prince Dipendra turns 31 on 27 June. It is high time His Royal Highness got married. The Nepali people wish to celebrate his marriage soon and in the grandest manner. Everyone is worrying about when this will happen.

Life in Maoland

Chetan Kunwar in *Saptahik Janadesh*, 22 May

In teh villages, all issues related to land and property are looked after by the *Gaon Jana Samitis* (GJS) (Village People's Organisations). It approves transactions only after the buyer and the seller have come to an agreement. The cost involved is a two percent registration fee and Rs 5 for obtaining a form. People in villages are very pleased with this system. They no longer have to spend large sums of money to bribe officials at the Land Revenue office or bother with government bureaucracy. The GJS has stopped a lot of money from going to the government's coffers—land is an important source of government revenue.

The judiciary of the People's Government is simple and practical. All cases are dealt with locally. Crime has been divided into three categories, the "very serious", the "serious" and the "ordinary". After a case has been filed at the people's court, a verdict is passed only after it has been thoroughly investigated. Those found guilty might be sentenced to death, labour camps or be fined, but they can also appeal the verdict. In all cases dealt with by the People's Courts, the participation of villagers is the overriding principle, and they do participate. The villagers provide practical rather than technical solutions, unlike those handed out by the courts of the reactionary forces (the government).

Major changes are also taking place on the economic front. A new people's economy is being formed, with an emphasis on communes. In a war situation like now, the economy must be made self-sufficient. All production systems are being transformed into collectives or communes, whether for farming, cattle rearing or manufacturing. Financial institutions are also being established in many villages. This process is being hastened because most banks have pulled out from villages. The new financial institutions have been teaching villagers about the working of the proposed economy and how to be involved. They also provide loans to the needy. The prices of commodities are being regulated and guidelines

concerning them are being formed.

Plots of land are being pooled and these are being cultivated to provide employment to families of martyrs, and to feed the people's army and volunteers. Cottage industries are also being promoted. Weaving is a major component of such industries and training is being provided to those who need it. In winter the weaving and textile set-ups provide the woollen garments needed by the people's army and villagers. Collectives for cattle farming are also being encouraged, particularly in the higher Himalaya. This is being extended to the tarai and hill regions too. Community forests are another important issue the people's government is looking into. Forests that were cut down in the last 10 to 15 years are now full of trees. Massive reforestation is being carried out. Community forests are being developed in all villages, and committees are being formed to deal with the issue appropriately. The forests are an important source of revenue of the people's government.

Alcohol has been banned. Decadent lifestyles are not allowed, although people can enjoy themselves within limits. All music and songs under a people's government are based on the philosophy of the party, and about the working class and a progressive society. The people's government is taking strong corrective measures against the present educational system. Education is free of cost until standard ten. Sanskrit is no longer taught and the singing of the national anthem has been stopped. Teachers are being asked to be more careful and regular, and school management is being strengthened. There is Education for the elderly in all villages, to enable them to at least read simple letters and notices.

All health centres are being put in order and irregularities in the distribution of medication are being rectified. Action is being taken against corrupt officials. Awareness programs are being conducted and health officials are always on the move to check on health centres. Roads, bridges, waiting rooms, martyrs' memorials, drinking water systems and other infrastructure is being built. Villagers are no longer dependent on others, but are carrying out development work themselves. The people's government formulates programmes and the villagers implement the plans.

BP (BP Koirala) died. *You've spent your lifetime in politics and have not started a family...* By starting a family, do you mean marriage? I did not have the time to marry. When could I have got married? Even when we were in exile, I had to work to make a living. I fought for democracy, don't you think I'm happy now that the object of my desire has been realised. I married democracy.

A lovely mouthful of *paan* Kedar Bhattarai in *Gorkhapatra*, 24 May

गोरखापत्र

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai has confessed that he still chews 30 *paans* (beetle leaves) a day. He made the admission while addressing a recent convention of the Paan Business Association of Nepal. Bhattarai also said this was the first time that the chief guest of a function complemented the occasion, and that he was very happy to be addressing the association. Sambhu Prasad Chaurasiya, a *paan-wallah* told all present that Bhattarai was a true *paan* connoisseur after which the latter was presented with a bundle of *paan*, which he graciously accepted. He chewed *paan*



MIN BAIRACHARYA

throughout the function. Bhattarai started chewing *paan* when he was living in Benaras. He spent 14 years in Sundarjal prison, where he did not get to chew *paan*. But he has compensated for the discomfort after he was freed. He said perhaps the administration of the time thought they could break him if they did not provide him with *paan* at regular intervals. It didn't work, he said. He added that all *paan* lovers shouldn't just pay for the *paan* they consume, but should also invest in the business. Bhattarai, who has been living in Kathmandu for 50 years, said he had given loans to many people to begin selling *paan*. In 1951, he said, Rs 100 was enough to open a *paan* shop. He might as well have opened a *paan* shop himself—Bhattarai says he once paid over IRs 100 for a mouthful of *paan*.

Missing files Jana Aastha weekly, 23 May

आस्था

The pension records of Nepali soldiers who died fighting in the Indian army are mismanaged and there is much bungling in the distribution of pensions. In fact, money is siphoned off. According to sources at the foreign ministry, as names, address and their verification are often inaccurate, a lot of the money does not reach the people it is supposed to, but remains instead with the Indian

Embassy. The Indian Embassy has not released the names or even the number of Nepali soldiers who have died fighting for the Indian government. Sources say that in order to be employed by the Indian army, many Nepali youth lie their age, name and place of residence. Since Bahuns are not enlisted into the Indian army, they also lie about their caste. This has been a practice since the days of Rana rule. It is when these people are killed in battle or die while on duty that the trouble starts. Since they have have lied about their identities, their bodies cannot be identified and their families do not get the money that is their due. According to sources, there may be as many as 4,000 people that have lied their identities but are still serving the Indian army.

These problems grew in magnitude under King Mahendra's reign, and so he set up the Gorkha Recruitment and Pension Unit under the foreign ministry. The main duty of this unit was to keep proper records of all Nepali soldiers killed on duty in the Indian army and to collect their pension payments from the Indian government for proper distribution to their families. But India did not let this unit function. The Indian side threatened that if Nepali authorities began distributing pensions, they would close all pension offices in Nepal and the Nepali authorities would have collect to the money from Gorakhpur, India. Today there are no signs of whether that the foreign ministry is aware of the unit or not, and no paperwork on it exists.

Deer-killer Colonel cleared Jana Aastha weekly, 23 May

आस्था

Colonel Dilip Rana who was caught hunting deer in Chitwan has been cleared of all charges. Colonel Narendra Aryal of the Royal Nepal Army, who is in charge of the army's legal affairs, said that RNA's image was being tarnished by unconfirmed and false reports. The RNA is deployed to protect wildlife, but ironically, soldiers have been caught killing endangered species. And now the RNA's image is tarnished further—by the brass' decision to give Colonel Rana a clean chit.

Even the government has proved ineffective in the face of the army. Earlier, it had issued a press release stating that those found guilty of hunting in protected areas would be punished. The assistant minister for forests even stated publicly that the guilty would not be let off lightly. But even the assistant minister has been proved helpless by the army's decision.

Rana is said to have good connections with the army top brass. In fact, he has already served as secretary of a very important unit in the army hierarchy. Rana is also the son-in-law of former army chief, Dharmapalbar Singh Thapa. The former chief is said to be involved in an arms-selling scandal, and this new incident only proves that he still calls the shots in the armed force. The district forest officer who caught Rana hunting has been promised that he will be sent to Switzerland for "training"—or maybe to keep his mouth shut.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

All I can say is that the prime minister should have been implicated based on the conditions imposed by the CIAA, but it will not be appropriate for me to say why this did not happen. Subhas Chandra Nemuwang, Chairman Public Accounts Committee in an interview given to the *Tarun National Weekly*, 29 May 2001



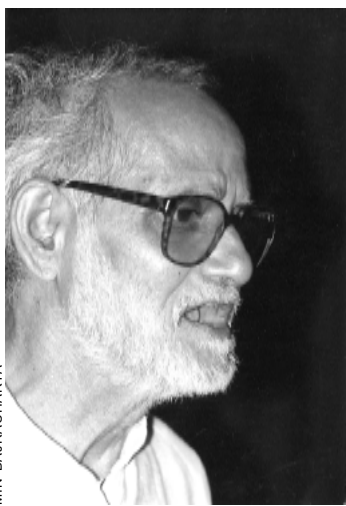
'We will expose the corrupt!' Banner: Lauda PM resign! Flying suruwal: China South-West

Himalaya Times, 27 May

"Married to democracy" Excerpts from an interview with Sushil Koirala, MP, Nepali Congress, *Gorkhapatra*, 24 May

गोरखापत्र

You have been in politics for a very long time. What were your happiest and saddest moments? My happiest moment was when democracy was restored in this country, my saddest moment, when



MIN BAIRACHARYA

Mud and Bike championship



SALIL SUBEDI

The NMBA championship is the only recognised national level international-class mountain bike championship in Nepal.

SALIL SUBEDI

Under blue skies interrupted by the wispiest of clouds, 72 off-road mountain bikers from seven countries, waited for the shotgun to begin the fifth National Mountain Bike Championship. The contest, an annual event of the Nepal Mountain Bike Association (NMBA), was held on 26 May this year, beginning at Gairi Gaun, a deserted stone quarry on the southern flanks of the Swayambhu section of the Ring Road.

Chimmi Gurung the chairman of the NMBA was saying: "This is the last call, if anybody has any queries about the circuit and the race, please ask now... Some parts of the trail have been washed out by the rain. Expect a lot of mud on your tyres... All right, everybody's clear." This is serious stuff—the NMBA championship is the only recognised national level international-class mountain bike championship in Nepal, and it is slowly gaining international recognition as a contest to be reckoned with.

The 46 competitors in the senior division were deadly serious. Only a slight smile on some faces belied the sense of anticipation in the air. The contestants were a mixed lot, from tattooed Thamel folk to a lone female participant wearing a strange contraption to

protect a sprained foot. As soon as the pistol resounded, the bikers shot off, only to navigate a hair-raising hairpin bend to get to the south hill of the circuit gate and then whizz down a dirt track leading north. There are a few obstacles on this path, which after one-and-a-half km goes west towards Nagarjun hill. There's an uphill one km slog past a gumpa, where the path was particularly, well, muddy. It was on this segment that most of the racers tasted mythical Kathmandu mud, after which they careened down a bone-shaking gravel path. They went around this 4.5 km track not once, but five gruelling times, covering 22.5 km most of us hope we never have to walk across, leave along race.

Predictably, most racers lost speed on the uphill, but there was plenty of opportunity to do so on the downhill, too. And this was shown to full advantage by Kiwi John Thompson, described by spectators as "the crazy one." Descending at approximately 50 km/hr from the highest point on the course, he hit a rock and flew right off his disc-brake bike. The children up the hill fell down laughing. Thompson, who went on to win the senior's title in just over an hour, enjoyed it thoroughly. "That's how I got my energy. I

loved each moment of this bond I had with the kids out there. And many thanks to Philippe who lent me his bike," he said, pointing to a French racer in the junior division who offered Thompson his bike when he saw him with a flat tyre near the circuit gate. But there were also other lucky factors in Thompson's win. His nearest competitor, Chandra Bahadur Chettri, was barely a minute behind him—until, that is, he got a flat. "I was in the middle of nowhere. I was helpless," sighs Chettri.

The first runner-up, Canadian Richard Torgen had a less dramatic, but very consistent ride. Suresh Dulal, who finished third, had three rough falls, but managed to maintain his position. "I lost so much speed recovering from the falls, but I did my best," he said. Not a single contestant dropped out because they were tired and couldn't hack it, including Erin Ryan, the Canadian woman with a splint on her sprained foot. In the senior division, 34 bikers finished the circuit.

Also exciting and equally "do or die" were the 26 under-18s in the junior division. They did two laps on the circuit instead of five, and were wildly excited. Young Sanjay Shrestha from Samakhushi, who finished in tenth place, had quietly skipped breakfast and slipped out from home with his heavy bike. One of the fastest juniors, nine-year-old half-Australian half-Sherpa Sunny, was the pre-race crowd favourite, but unfortunately took a bad spill at the beginning of his second lap. Many juniors fell, but there were no serious injuries. Ten-year-old Heman was unfazed by the rough trail. This student of Little Angel's School who bicycled all the way from Sat Dobato, seven km from venue, won the trophy for the youngest to finish the circuit.

Eighteen-year-olds Arjun Ghale (first position, 24 minutes 46.82 seconds) and Sanjeev Thapa (second, 25 minutes 37.02 seconds) showed what the younger participants could do given a few years of experience. Thapa was the winner last year of the Himalayan Mountain Bike Championship held at the same venue. But he wasn't doing too well, and only barely put Ravindra Adhikary (25 minutes 58 72 seconds) in third place.

These precise times come courtesy the organisers, who made sure every participant went back with a formal notification of their timing and position. This may seem like the obvious thing to do, but pervious mountain bike championships in Nepal have not bothered to actually keep any such records. "We don't want anybody to go back without knowing and having official proof of their timings and position—they have worked so hard just to even participate," says Sanjeev Pandey, the director of the race and a member of the NMBA. The chief time-keeper was none other than Nepal's record-breaking senior marathoner, Baikuntha Manandhar. "The boys are good," he said. "They're committed and that's what I like about this whole thing."

While the racers were struggling on the track and the timekeepers were watching, eagle-eyed, there was plenty of excitement among the

Vital statistics			
Junior Division (9 km):			
Arjun Ghale	24 min 46.82 sec	Nepal	5,000 cash & trophy
Sanjeev Thapa	25 min 37.02 sec	Nepal	4,000 "
Ravindra Adhikari	25 min 58.72 sec	Nepal	3,000 "
Senior Division (22.5 km):			
John Thomson 33	1 hr 00 min 59 sec	New Zealand	10,000 cash & trophy
Richard Torgen 35	1 hr 02 min 4 sec	Canada	7,000 "
Suresh K Dulal 21	1 hr 04 min 11 sec	Nepal	5,000 "
Top Female Racer (22.5 km) :			
Erin Ryan, Canada			
Youngest Racer (9 km) :			
Heman Pun, 10, Nepal			
Oldest Racer (22.5 km) :			
Sonam Gurung, 52, Nepal			
Time keeper			
Baikuntha Manandhar, marathoner, and Sushil Nar-singh Rana, a coach, both with the Nepal Athletics Association			
Race Director			
Sanjeev Pandey (NMBA)			

spectators. They were kept entertained by a multitude of things—

whistling time-keepers, first-aid squads rushing hither and thither on motorbikes, kids cheering vociferously in between scarfing down vast amounts of ice cream, a Manangi and Sherpa volunteer family distributing a Nanglo lunch box and bananas to the racers and volunteers, and a swarm of monkey-like children grabbing at the fruit.

Mountain biking began gaining popularity in Nepal about a decade ago. The Himalayan Mountain Bike Tours and Expedition organised the first MB race here in 1993. It was a 32 km race starting from Kakani

finishing at Budhanilkantha, and attracted 72 mountain bikers from Scotland, England, Australia, Denmark, Belgium and Nepal. The NMBA, which was formed and recognised by the National Sports Council in 1995, is an active member of the Asian Cycling Confederation and Union Cyclist Internationale. This year's Nepal Mountain Bike Championship was the association's fifth.


"Our objective here is to promote mountain biking in Nepal. We want to attract a large number of domestic racers and turn them into professionals, and make Nepal an international mountain biking venue," says Umesh Rimal, a

member of the NMBA "The NMBA is confident that such races will help promote tourism in Nepal—plenty of people love to mountain bike in such wild terrain and enchanting landscapes," he adds. "We plan to send the Nepali mountain bikers to participate in the seventh Asian Mountain Bike Championship to be held in Korea in October this year. But we are trying to raise funds," says Chimmi Gurung.

Whether that happens or not, even as the dust was settling on the track at the end of this race, NMBA members were already scheduling for an international race at a similar venue in Nepal next March. ♦





SALIL SUBEDI



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The club

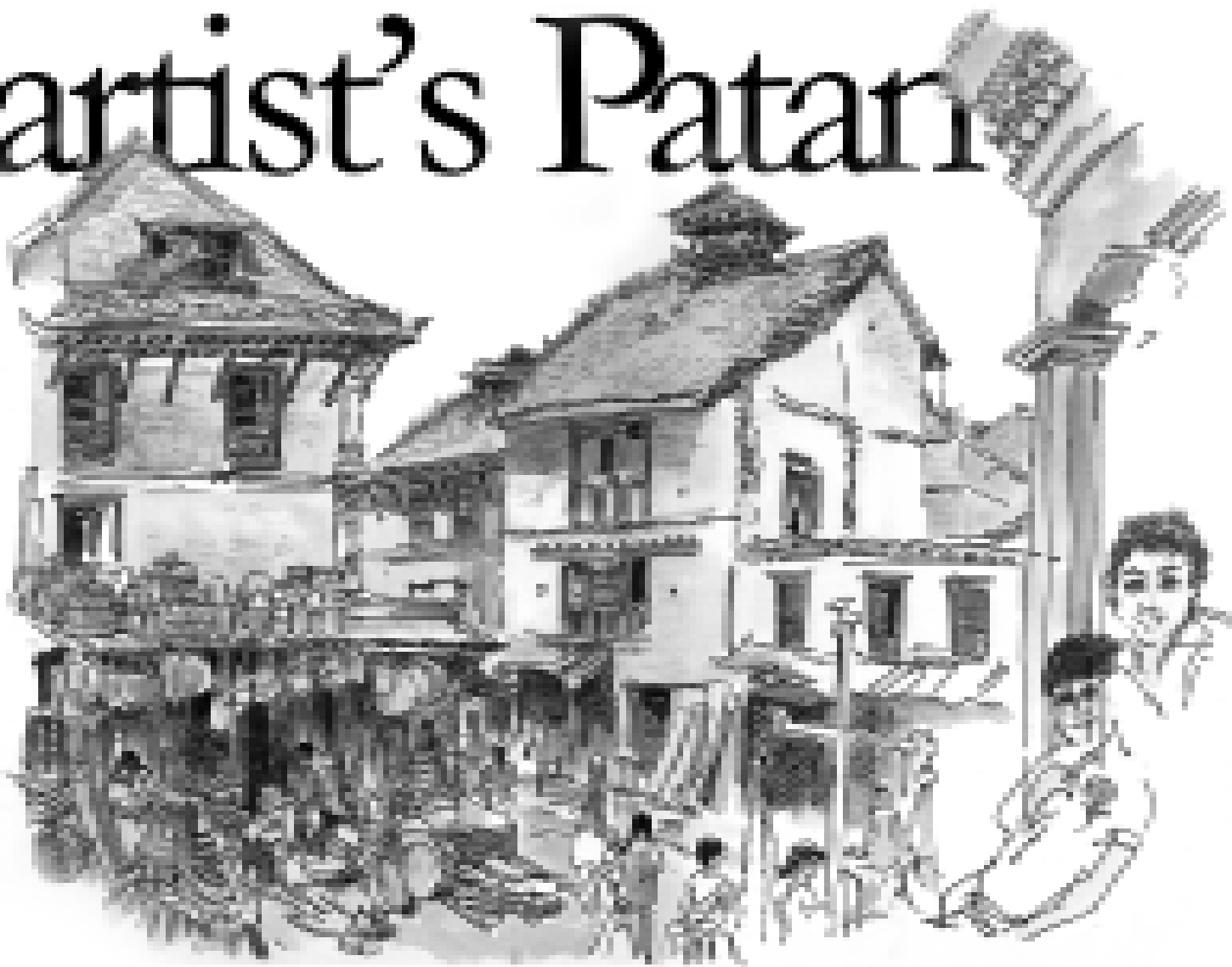
An artist's Patan

Forget the obvious, refuse the luxury coaches that race you to palaces and temples and rudely scatter crowds in the Durbar Square. Walk through Patan. Down a lane where a tantric shrine gaudy with murals of witches and warlocks and skeletons exorcise spells if one walks through its tunnel-like passage. Or happen into courtyards where children play about stupas or ride protective stone lions. Climb a mound wearing an old gnarled tree to be told that beneath you is a Lichchhavi palace.

Sip fizzy drinks in a Tibetan carpet shop. Wonder at two Staffordshire dogs in a shop full of Nepali trinkets. Be guided by the sound of hammer on metal into alleys where brass and copper pots are made. Be led by friendly and instant guides into

houses up rickety stairs where, in some rooms so low one cannot stand, a master craftsman fashions images. A youth who led me to these busy ateliers, where invariably I was asked to sit on beds with embroidered covers, asked me if I would visit his own.

The street was dirty and full of slush. He apologized. And he apologized again for the long steep climb to his room. We sat on Tibetan rugs and he ordered tea. Then from a tin trunk he took a pile of scrolls and unrolled them one at a time. He had painted them himself in the highly disciplined style of Tibetan *thangka* art. They were beautiful and far removed from the gaudy varnished scroll paintings found in curio shops. Were there others like him, I asked. With unmistakable pride



It is easy to believe one needs a bamboo cage, rush mats, coloured baskets, rope belts, woven straw shoes and skeins of gaudy rope. I filled a garage with instant love but useless afterthoughts.

he answered, "Oh, yes this is a city of artists."

One of my favourite corners in Patan, closeby the Durbar Square is a courtyard taken over by cane weavers and potters. The shopkeepers are kindly and it is

easy to believe that one needs a bamboo cage or rush mats or coloured baskets, rope belts, woven straw shoes and skeins of gaudy rope. I filled a garage with instant love but useless afterthoughts. But something I

treasure is the round thick rope mats that many Nepali and my young artist friend use as seats. Carried by an obliging attendant and slid deftly under me as I sit to sketch, this scrap of salvation from my favourite

cane shop has eased many an hour of painful sitting on antique stone. ♦

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



MIN BAURACHARYA

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Kundan Sharma

WITH CONFIDENCE AND FINESSE

Poet Kundan Sharma stands out from the growing numbers of women poets of today for the confidence and finesse of her voice. Some of her best poems speak to the issue of women's exploitation, and do so with a rare combination of conviction and art. Sharma does not flinch from hard social and psychological issues—the commodification of women's flesh, the erasure of women's personalities, neglect, discrimination and degradation. Yet they do not sacrifice art for the sake of their message; the unusual turns of phrases and expressions make her poetry fresh and alive. Both poems translated below appear in *Kabita*, the poetry journal of the Royal Nepal Academy.

Flesh Trade

It's true that flesh trade goes on here
Was there ever a time when it didn't?
Dress yourself in the marketplace's speech
or wear pajamas of kinship at home
or on a stage, offering the name of beauty
strip me naked exhibiting my every part
All you need is my body
so fornicate with that
Buy it or sell it for intercourse
enjoy it once you own it in the name of love
look for your lineage in my womb
or plot to earn riches through me
Give it any name
give it any false respectability

you are a mere devotee of my body
So take it, using any excuse
Who has ever understood my heart?
Who has sought it out?
Who feels any need for it?
I an excellent composition of nature
have always lived as a wish for pleasure
Here—the walls of kinship aren't respected
no age difference remains
your hand won't keep from patting the
bodies
of the little girls sitting on my lap
It's true that flesh trade goes on here
Was there ever a time when it didn't?
Raise your eyes and examine
each street, each house
the stage, the papers, the cinemas and
television
—everywhere, all over the place
you'll see my body there
All that has changed today
is that you used to force me at first
whereas now of my own accord
I strip myself—I sell myself
and meet my own costs
Possibly this is the single attraction
you feel towards me
Possibly this is the only control
I command over you
As long as the beast in you lives
and my self-respect doesn't awaken
this trade will continue in this way
this trade will go on in exactly this way

The Ardhanarishwar Deity

There must be a sky for me somewhere
There must be an earth somewhere
that can be deemed my own
I, a part of your creation
who should I blame—
you or myself
or the rebellion burgeoning inside me?
A long time I've lived here in hiding
concealing myself
but my inner self couldn't reject myself
All my feelings were natural for me
there was no one to understand this though
If birth is reality why can't we accept
that it can take any form?
Just because the boundaries of your thinking
are set I won't be faulted
for not falling inside them
Why then had you accepted in this land
the half-Shiva half-Shakti deity
Ardhanarishwar?
You refuse to see
that I can be born as anyone
in the bone-skin-flesh
of somebody's body and life force
I can grow up and live as anything
as a woman or man
as man in woman
as woman in man
I'm your own progeny
Don't give me up
disgraced by humiliation

From your love I demand
the right to exist as myself
the capacity to stand fearless
beneath this sky
For somewhere there must be a life
that can be my own
Somewhere somebody
will surely wait for me too

Sharma is also the author of a poetry collection, *Yo Mann*. She currently lives in Delhi.



ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

❖ **The Club, Bhatbhateni** Latest Hindi movie and latest top-ten English movie, 7pm, free.

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

EATING OUT

❖ **Sekuwa (BBQ) Night** Dwarika's Hotel. Starters, meats, vegetarian selections, dessert, complementary drink. Traditional dance in lamp lit Newari courtyard. Rs 699. Friday nights. 479488

❖ **La'Soon Restaurant and Vinotheque** Lunch, tea and dinner with European and American food, fine wines. Pulchowk. 535290

❖ **Brunch with swimming** Shangri La Kathmandu's award-winning garden. Rs 700 + tax. 412999

❖ **Wet & Wild Summer** Swimming in a cool pool and a buffet lunch. Saturdays at Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350. Taxes extra. 560675, 560775

❖ **Mango Tango** Exotic mangoes desserts Hotel de l' Annapurna. All day, all food and beverage outlets.

❖ **Movenpick** Exotic desserts at the ice-cream lounge, Darbar Marg.

MUSIC

❖ **2:001 For the Love of Rock** Vibes Entertainment presents the third annual rock festival with Robin and Looza, Flower Generation, Axata, Albatross, and Hybrid Pressurize. Scout Headquarters, Lainchour. Rs 200. 2 June. Win free tickets online at www.vibes.com.np

❖ **Cadenza** Jazz at the Upstairs Bar, Lazimpat, Wednesday, Friday 7.30pm. Rs 200

DANCE

❖ **Sounds from the Underground** Dance party at Simply Shuttters Bistro, Baber Mahal Revisited. 1 June, 8pm onwards. Rs 300.

EVENTS

❖ **Fanta Grand Fun Fair** Live music, games and food. Godavari Alumni Association and Cohort 1,2,3 June. Jawalakhel Grounds.

❖ **Stress Free Weekends** Overnight stay at the Hyatt, dinner for two at the Rox Restaurant, use of pool, health club, spa and outdoor jacuzzi, ayurvedic massage for two, weekend brunch, late check out Sunday. Rs 9000 plus tax. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234

❖ **Pheri Jaun Hai Pokhara** Free airfare, room, breakfast, airport transport, use of health club and lots more. Rs 1500 for Nepalis, \$45 for expats. Shangri La Hotel & Resort; sales@hotelshangrila.com, 412999

❖ **Spiny Babbler Museum** Readings and presentations of contemporary Nepali literature and art, Sundays 5-6pm Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel; Tuesdays 4-5pm Kathmandu Environment Education Project, Thamel; Thursdays 7-8pm Bamboo Club Restaurant, Thamel, Saturdays 5-6pm New Orleans Café, Thamel. spinybabbler@mos.com.np. 542810, 546725

❖ **Poetry, Meditation, Music** Learn practical techniques of meditation to find peace for positive livingLive meditative music, poetry, short lecture on spirituality. Sri Chinmoy Centre and Budhanilkantha School. Buhaniikantha School Assembly Hall. 2 June, 9am-11am. Free.

❖ **Discourse** Swami Subodhananda, Jain Mandir, Kamalpokhari. Chinmaya Sangh Nepal, in Hindi. 1-7 June, 7.30am-8.30am (Driga Drishya Vivek), 5.30pm– 7pm (Ram Charitra Manas). 521379

❖ **The Club, Bhatbhateni** Rusty Nails play Friday nights, 7pm, free. Saturday poolside BBQ, bingo, music. Rafting, 2 June. Includes one night at the Riverside Spring Resort, BBQ, breakfast. theclub@ntc.net.np. 426238, 416430

EXHIBITION

❖ **If Bodies have Voices** From the Street: Kathmandu 1985-1995. Photographs by Wayne Amtzis. 25 May-11 June. Amtzis reads from his collection City on His Back. 3 June, 4pm. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 411122

❖ **Mani: Jewelled Words of Tibetan-Buddhism on Flags, Wheels, and Stones** Fulbright Scholar Katherine Anne Paul's research on the popular use and manufacture of Tibetan religious artefacts in Nepal. Until 2 June. Bamboo Gallery, Panipokhari. 412507

MARTIN CHAUTARI

❖ **Formal and Informal Judicial System and VDC's Judicial Rights Pundits:** Advocate DN Parajuli, Dinesh Prasai CVICT. Unless otherwise noted all discussion are in Nepali. 5 June, 5.30pm Martin Chautari. Thapathali.

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

BOOKWORM



Mahāmudrā: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation Takpo Tashi Namgyal, trans. Lobsang P Lhalungpa
Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1993/2001
Rs 792
The first English translation of a major Buddhist manual detailing the various stages and practices for training the advanced student of Mahayana and Vajrayana meditation. The original Tibetan text was composed by Namgyal (1512-1587), a great lama and scholar of the Kagyu Buddhist sect.



The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra GW Farrow, I Menon
Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1992/2001
Rs 632
The Hevajra Tantra is a non-dual Yogini tantra of the late Mantrayana Buddhist tradition composed in north-east India in the late eighth century. This text constitutes the essence of sophisticated, but controversial, tantric methods and is an authoritative account of the classic tantric period of India in religious history (5-13 century).



Great Eastern Sun: The Wisdom of the Shambhala
Chögyam Trungpa
Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1999
Rs 1,875
The follow-up to Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior. Trungpa addresses our deepest fears: the alienation of modern life, depression, materialism, aggression, anger, anxiety, and lack of self-worth. He says we are all powerful and genuine individuals who need to ignite the warrior within.



Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat: Land of Medicine Buddha,
February-April 1999 Lama Zopa Rinpoche
Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Weston, Mass., 2000
Rs 1,500
“Doing Vajrasattva retreat is not simply about reciting the mantra and saying some prayers. It is about making the practice effective for your mind, making it the quickest, most powerful way to transform your mind.” Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath

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Mountain Biking HMB
for all your mountain biking needs—full workshop, repair facilities, all models. Pick up, delivery, professional mechanics. Bike clothing, spare parts, accessories. Hire, buy, sell, new and second-hand bikes. Himalayan Mountain Bike. www.bikingnepal.com. 437437.

For insertions ring NT Marketing at 543333-36.

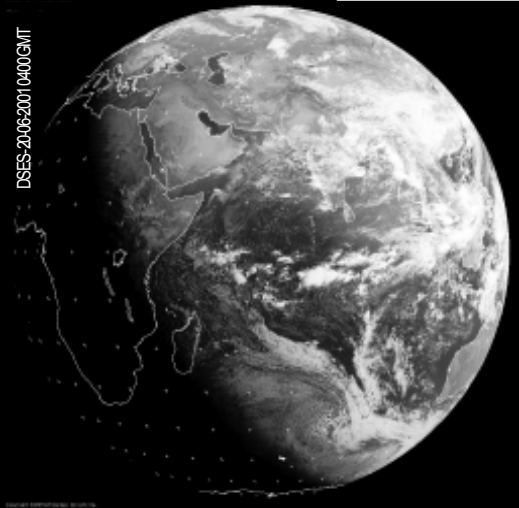
YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU








NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



The monsoon is still on progress. The inter tropical convergence zone (ITCZ), a seasonal low pressure belt that often lies parallel along the equatorial line is gradually shifting close to Himalaya to bring vigorous rains. Presence of a strong low-pressure system in the north Indian plain has also created a favorable condition to move moisture-laden air toward the region both easterly from Bay of Bengal and southwesterly from Arabian Sea. Once the two branches meet week the first cycle of monsoon completes, which remains active for another two to four days. As seen in the latest satellite images rainfall will occur almost regularly over the week, and more often during night. The next active monsoon cycle begins after four to seven days of break (i.e. rain free period). Because of daily rainfall last week, mercury levels have fallen significantly by up to 3 degrees in average. The weather is getting humid

KATHMANDU

Fri  28-20	Sat  27-19	Sun  28-20	Mon  29-20	Tue  28-20
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BBC on FM 102.4

Mon-Fri	0615-0645	BBC World Today
Sat	0615-0645	BBC Science in Action
Sun	0615-0645	BBC Agenda
Daily	2045-2115	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा



रेडियो सगरमाथा

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If bodies have voices



poet Wayne Amtzis’ photographic exhibition currently on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery compels its viewers to acknowledge the difficult socio-economic circumstances experienced by Kathmandu Valley child laborers, abandoned women, petty traders and porters. The collection of 43 black and white photographs is an uncompromisingly harsh portrayal of the vicissitudes of modern urban life. It depicts the drudgery of physical labor, moments of hopeless respite from work, solitary mad women, dejected street vendors, and

elders whose furrowed brows bear testament to their struggles to earn a daily wage.

What is remarkable about this ten year retrospective is the intimate engagement between the artist and his subjects. Those photographed are aware they are objects of the camera’s gaze, yet there is an unusual degree of consent, albeit momentary, to allow Amtzis to penetrate their lives. Both parties tacitly acknowledge that a kind of intrusion is occurring, but somehow appear to recognize that this intrusion, on *this* occasion, with the sympathetic nature of *this* camera lens, *must* happen. Thus do the subjects engage directly with the viewer, unapologetically offering a piece of their troubled lives. This frankness reveals itself more the longer one spends on each photograph.

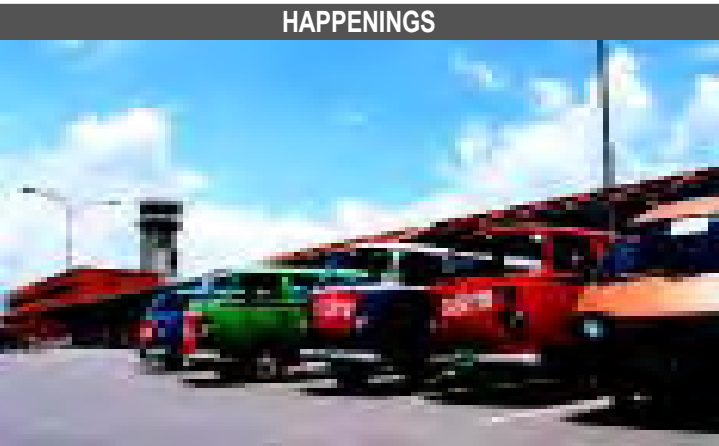
Take for instance, the *Youth at Indrachowk* (#9). This handsome boy is seated for a brief respite from his work as a porter. At any moment, his name will be called out to haul a load probably beyond his capacity. His facial expression is one of explicit engagement. He seems fresh, still innocent, but his eyes have begun to ask “why me?” As viewers, we can weave a narrative as we move on to the young man in *National Refrigerator, Gairidhara* (#12). He seems to designate the future of the boy from #9. Yet a sense of determination still emerges in his face and eyes. This young man knows his life is hard, but he hasn’t succumbed to resignation and despair.

The people whose portraits appear in this exhibit are cornered by the walls and streets of Kathmandu. The barbed wire they hang to, the ropes looped around their bodies and hands tell us how bound and limited are their lives. Representing “everyman”—they symbolize the drudgery carried out daily by millions of Nepalis. In a wider sense Amtzis’ photographs provide a global commentary of on-the-edge urban workers and denizens of the street. Giving themselves the time these portraits deserve, the viewers can move beyond cursory impressions and appreciate the exhibition’s complexity and subtlety. With patient scrutiny, what emerges are highly personalized “voices” which convey narratives specific to each individual.

The serendipitous timing of the taking of these photographs (1985-1995) makes for disheartening political commentary. In today’s Kathmandu “democracy” has arrived. Civil sector groups and NGOs flourish; politicians wax eloquent while expatriate and local development *wallahs* continually reproduce new ‘agendas.’ Meanwhile, life for those depicted here remains unchanged.

As a complement to this exhibit, Amtzis will read at the gallery from his poetry collection, “City on his Back” at 4 PM on Sunday, June 3. ♦

From the Street: Kathmandu 1985-1995 Photos by Wayne Amtzis Siddhartha Art Gallery May 25-June 11, 2001 Babar Mahal Revisited



DAY ONE: Tourism entrepreneurs fielded Volkswagen Vans with “Tourist” banners to ferry tourist groups to and from the airport as the strike got underway on 27 May. For individual travellers, rickshaws were the best (and most expensive) way to get to town. The cheapest way was to walk.



DAY TWO: Bhaktapur shops wear a deserted look as tourists stay away on the second day of the strike.



DAY THREE: No one is left out of this public meeting organised by the organisers of the bandh. Ratna Park on 29 May.

KIRAN’S WINDHORSE

Kiran Manandhar, a prolific and versatile painter known for his celebratory use of color and stroke, has taken a new departure. A recent stay in Tibet, traveling and leading workshops in painting has introduced a collage-like element to his work. His current exhibit at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Thamel incorporates in each painting a Tibetan prayer flag with a windhorse and a wish-fulfilling jewel rising from its back.

At first glance, much like many western artists, he seems to be utilizing an artifact from a culture even more “exotic” than his own. A more thorough viewing indicates the boldness of his attempt. The dominant image, whether it is integrated into Kiran’s vocabulary of evocative color and energetic stroke or not, makes itself known throughout the exhibit. So close to Tibet’s borders, a flag of Tibetan origin is raised in the landscape of Kiran’s work.

These paintings are more contained than Kiran’s previous endeavors. Though drawn from the openness and power of the Tibetan landscape, there is a sense of enclosure that even Kiran’s color-rich palette and free flowing

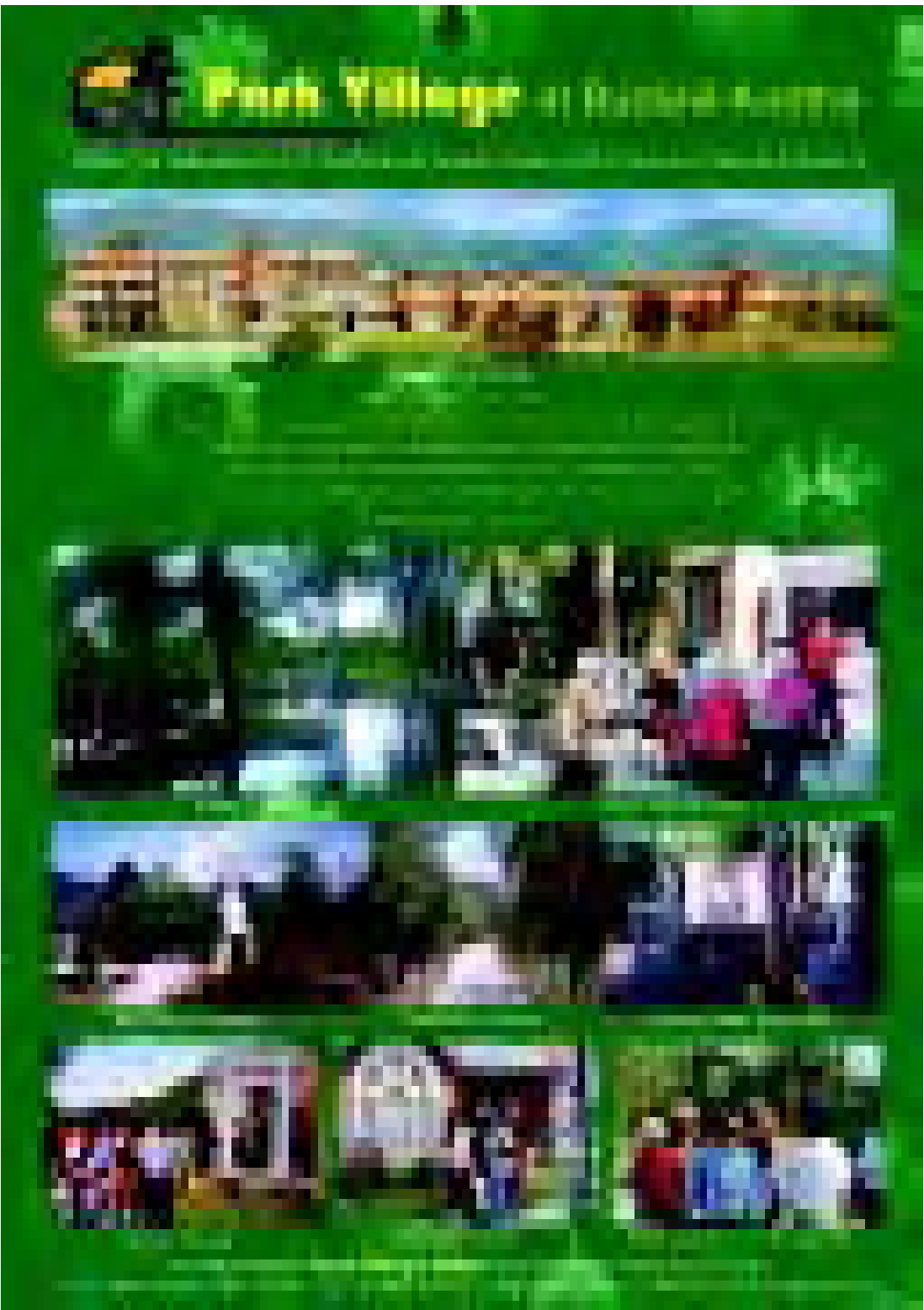


strokes cannot break free of. These new limits set on the artist’s freedom of expression allows for an honest contemporary reading of place. The brooding figures of woman or lovers that appear in many of Kiran’s canvasses are here as well, and their juxtaposition to the prayer flag adds a personal

dimension. In #6 and in # 26 we see these figures with the prayer flags. In one, a woman turns towards the flag and the viewer senses encounter; in the other, two figures, mutually engaged, seem not to notice the flag’s presence. Interest and indifference, an emotional opening towards commitment and a troubled emotional entanglement, set the parameters of engagement with a wider world.

Kiran is persistent in his use of the Tibetan prayer flags. Whether the windhorse flies above, or lies submerged, or even fails to enter into or modify Kiran’s abstract landscapes, their presence must be accounted for in whatever aesthetic conclusions the viewer may draw from his work. ♦

Kiran Manandhar, Everest Contemporary Art Gallery, Arcadia Building, Thamel.





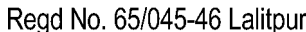
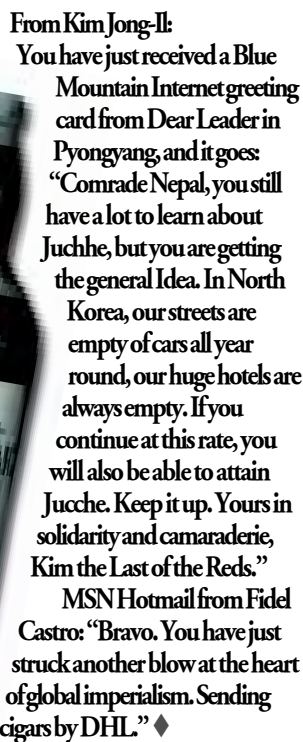
by Kunda Dixit

- live to see another day
- 5,678 marriage processions dispersed nationwide
- At least 3.2 litres of Single Malt allegedly consumed in one newspaper office alone.

If all this could be achieved in three days, how much more could be done in a week...two weeks...a month. Insider sources tell us Party HQ is now inundated with congratulatory messages of heartfelt felicitation and

One Great Leap Forward, Two Leaps Back

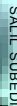
- 3,108 bicycle tyres deflated
- 7.3 million litres of petrol and kerosene-laced diesel saved
- 35 goats, 57 ducks and 403 chicken which would otherwise have been lost to road kill on our highways



NEPALI SOCIETY

Thank you, Dr Tej

When he came to Chisapani Gorge inside the Bardiya National Park, our mammalian proximity sense told us he had pitched camp near a big cliff and had befriended an old fisherman. The two used to row upstream to reach the tranquil waters in the middle of the gorge. It was all very amusing for us. We jumped up for fresh air often and looked over at him, but we were too quick and he never saw us. We liked him. We learnt that he was quite a rare specimen—a Tribhuvan University-trained zoologist honoured by over 20 international scientific organisations like the Institute of Biology UK, the Linnean Society of London, and the British Ornithological Union. After about a month, we decided to surprise him. It was a beautiful early morning. “Doctor sahib, go home. Only *sanyasis* wander around like this,” the fisherman was telling Dr Tej Kumar Shrestha as they



We knew Dr Tej campaigned to create an aquatic wildlife preserve for us while everyone wanted to focus on terrestrial mammals—tigers, rhinos and elephants. We live in a complex ecological system, and though we are labelled endangered, locals still sell our meat. They call us *bhagirath* or *sonsh*, thinking that we arrived when Shiva sprouted water from his hair to create the Ganga. People hang our bones in doorways to drive away evil. Ayurvedic doctors extract oil from us for its supposed aphrodisiac, analgesic and antiseptic properties. But nobody except this doctor, who also knows all about Nepal's birds, has bothered to truly get to know us. Thank you, Dr Tej. ♦

Pepsodent