



GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Some countries pull back from the brink. Others don't. Some countries come close to the edge, catch a glimpse of the abyss below and turn around. Others may find it easier to just let go, and plunge into the darkness. After careening down the hill, past the precarious crises of the past year, Nepalis now have to quickly decide which way to turn.

There is an opportunity open to take the sane path of ending this insane war. To reconcile, and proceed with the real social and economic challenges. The other is the path to an uncivil war that will make the present level of violence look like a picnic. Which will we choose: the path of violence, or the path of a difficult peace? The apologists for violence will call all those who are for peace status quo-ists. In fact "status quo" itself becomes a bad word in a society where opportunists benefit from polarisation. If the alternative is to annihilate everything and jeopardise this nation's very existence, then we'd rather stay status quo-ists. It is the risk we take in accepting compassion and reason at a time when the psychosis of fear and violence dominate.

Those who want to destroy get a thrill out of violence. They are the cowards. Those who choose to build peace are not. It takes courage to stand up for peace when restraint is taken for treachery. The blood-seeking, unbending logic of revolutions cannot accommodate those who can understand the anger of those trapped by the momentum of an armed struggle. Those who dare show compassion for both sides do not fit because they are for compromise and harmony. In the inexorable winner-takes-all ideology of an armed struggle, there is no room for reason.


It is never too late to stop a war. But it is a much better idea to nurture an existing peace. Peace is not just an absence of war, it is a vigilant process of preserving a culture of tolerance, social justice and equity. To make peace grow, we need to address grievances before they pile up, to redress past neglect, to turn apathy into engagement. There is a political system in place to do this. It may be flawed, but it exists. It is called parliamentary democracy. To demolish everything before rebuilding is a wasteful alternative with potentially tragic consequences for our country.

There is no historical inevitability. Not even in our religious myths. A nation's destiny is not fated, it is forged by actions its citizens take today.

TALE OF TWO MONARCHIES

There are two monarchies in our neighbourhood we can learn from: Cambodia and Thailand. In the mid-1970s the Vietnam War was winding down, uncertainty and chaos was in the air and both countries were wracked by insurgencies. Meddlesome powers were playing out their proxy wars. Cambodia took the path of anarchy and ruin that ultimately lead to a genocide that obliterated one-sixth of its population. The zealots who lead that revolution felt the death toll was immaterial in furthering the revolutionary cause of a peasant proletariat, and at the end of it all 1.5 million Cambodians were dead. Cambodia was the world's first, and so far only, Maoist monarchy.

Thailand took a different road. Its rulers were not the world's greatest democrats, but it was lucky in having a benign and creative monarch who worked in subtle ways to influence his country's political evolution. Thailand took the deliberate policy of bringing basic development to the areas

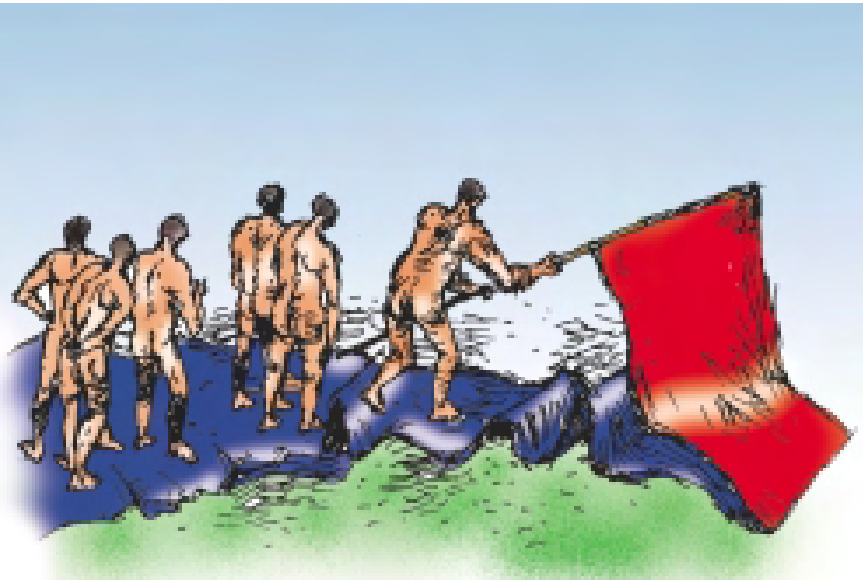


Legacy of the Khmer Rouge

where Thai Maoists were most active, paying special attention to the neglected northeast of the country. The government invested in health and education, and in infrastructure projects that linked remote areas to markets so that the locals benefited from selling produce.

It is much more difficult to build than to destroy. And Thailand today is living proof that the strategy of hard work for the longer term is well worth the effort. That evolution works better than revolution.

No country has a monopoly on violence and mayhem. No country has a monopoly on tolerance and gentility. Nepal does not automatically become the land of smiling and peace-loving people just because Gautam Buddha was born here. We have to work to give peace a chance.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Un-united Marxist-Leninists

The hammers and sickles are still going at each other hammers and tongs. But they are finally talking.

With peace overtures between Premier Deuba and Comrade Prachanda hogging the media limelight (including in this paper) other political games being played in the country have receded somewhat. But the rumoured unity between two major factions of Nepal Communist Party—the UML led by Madhav Nepal and the ML led by Bamdev Gautam—is of no less long term significance. After all, put together, they would be a formidable force and a challenge to the Maoists—particularly because Comrade Prachanda proposes to play outside the constitutional arena.

Maoists have the guns and the power of intimidation, but it's still the UML and ML that have cadres all over the country, committed to the politics of the ballot rather than of the gun. In the end, even the cadres prepared by Prachanda, when tired of life in the jungle, have to drift into the arms of a future UML-ML combine.

Even though Initial Gautam-Nepal meetings have been encouraging, unity between the estranged comrades will be difficult. No less difficult than the possibility of divorces consenting to return to the conjugal bed. One knows the other's dirty secrets, and the skeletons in the cupboard are rattling. They have also got used to living alone.

Neither has the electorate forgotten their mutual mudslinging just before the last parliamentary elections. Today, if the flag at the Balkhu Darbar looks tattered and discoloured, blame it on bickering comrades who attacked it with hammers and sickles.

What was it that prompted Prachanda to grab the gun six years ago? There are as many answers to that question as there are astroligers on the sidewalks of Ratna Park. Everything from rampant poverty, unemployment among Nepal's youth, a very high failure rate in SLC examinations, corruption in high places, conspirators in the court, instigation from abroad, and the process of globalisation have been blamed for the rise of left extremism in the country.

No doubt, these are causal factors that make people adopt desperate means without pausing to consider the consequences of their actions. But the collapse of the former united UML is no less responsible for the rapid rise of the Maoists and the acceptability that they have gained in certain sections of society. It also explains why disenchanted cadres are drifting to the extremity.

Obsessed with gaining and then holding power, the leaders of the UML forgot the very reason for their party's existence: spearheading

a political movement for social justice. As soon as that ideological anchor was lost, the disintegration of the party was inevitable. With Bamdev Gautam, Sahana Pradhan and the Mainali brothers deciding to break away, there was a sudden vacuum at the highest levels of the party-based political system.

Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai could of course have filled that space at the left end of the spectrum while remaining in mainstream politics. But the duo didn't have a credible political organisation, for their party was made up primarily of daydreamers in a trance of Stalinist utopia. Bhattarai and Prachanda also lacked the patience to lead a possibly long-drawn political movement. Both of them grew up in the 'here-and-now' Panchayat days when you associated patience with the decades-long political wilderness to which the Nepali Congress leadership was relegated. Canvassing quietly in the countryside is too effeminate, going around with a gun is far more charismatic.

Unfortunately, guns give control without legitimacy. Winning the genuine support of the people takes time. Once militants come over-ground, they suddenly realise there is no detergent powerful enough to wash away the blood stains of the past. Be it the Naxalites in India or the Shining Path in Peru, gradual demise is the ultimate fate of every armed rebellion fired by the power of hatred alone. Even the comrades that 'cut off' a handful of heads during the Jhapa Movement are today finding it hard to live down that experience.

The world needs radicals of the kind that Dr Martin Luther King Jr called "creative extremists". Like Matrika Yadav of the Maoists themselves, who uncharacteristically (for his party, that is) adopted a very Gandhian method of protest by going on a fast to draw the attention of jail authorities towards the dismal conditions in prisons.

If talks between Maoists and the government are successful—and that's no small 'if'—and the Maoists come above ground, it is likely that we will find them not as big a political force as their terror seems to signify. Once the armed rebellion ends, there will still be the need for a political party like the undivided NCP (UML) to speak on behalf of the downtrodden. The Nepali Congress has lost its socialist moorings, and we need to put our faith in the re-emergence of

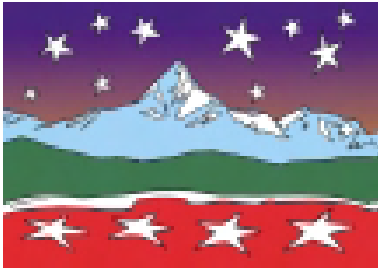
a truly united Marxist party pursuing a socialist agenda.

That is where the opportunity lies, and the factions of Nepal Communist Party had better seize it before it vanishes as swiftly as it has presented itself. As the leader of the largest faction, primary responsibility for forging a unity between the legitimate leftist forces of the country remains with Comrade Madhav Nepal.

To form a vision, all that Comrade Nepal needs to do is to look at the record of his idols in West Bengal. Indira Gandhi's trusted hatchet man, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, decimated the Naxalites in that state, but the primary beneficiary of Ray's efforts became Communist Party of India (Marxists). It came to power in the state in the seventies, and hasn't been voted out since. Free-market enthusiasts may not have liked Jyoti Basu, but it was under him that the West Bengal government succeeded in substantially reducing the number of people below the official poverty line. Today, Maharashtra may be the richest state in India, but it's CPM's Bengal that has lowest proportion of the official poverty.

Comrade Buddha Dev Bhattacharya, the new Chief Minister of West Bengal, seems to have finally realised his debt to the Naxalites. He has mooted the idea of giving a 'freedom fighter' pension to the surviving Naxalite cadres. Those acolytes of Charu Majumdar who have not either died, or accepted ideological death by becoming apologists for the marketplace, stand to benefit by this grand scheme. Prachanda and Bhattarai may not need the pension when they retire, but the common cadres of the Maoists could do with the money once they throw away the guns and forsake living on extortion.

We all live and learn. Perhaps the left will too. The Maoists are clawing at the door. ♦



NATION

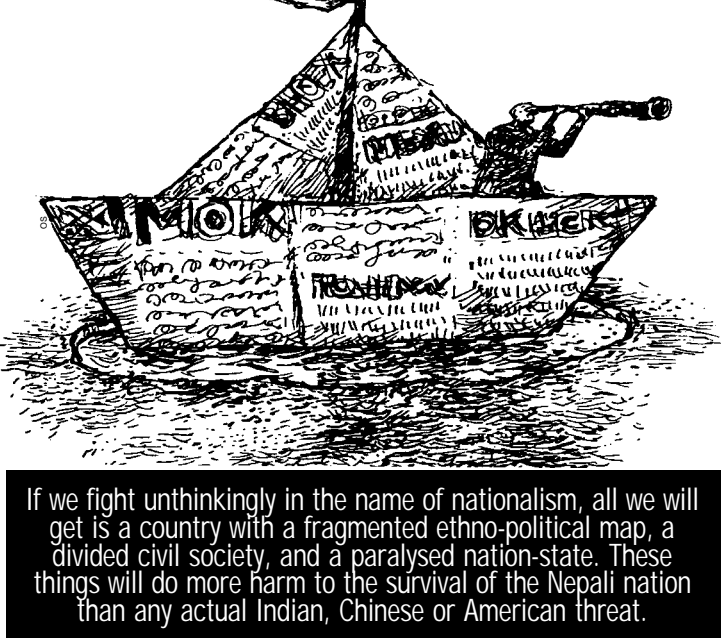
COMMENTARY

Nothing in the Nepali political landscape today is more divisive and emotionally charged than the subject of nationalism. The idea itself is a recent one, dating back to the end of the Rana oligarchy. Its power, however, demands that we construct a genealogy that dates back to the ages. Today, its pantheon includes such diverse figures as the architects of Gorkha expansion, the masters of Nepali literature and the generals of our war with British India. No matter that the same war made us lose one-third of the country to the British and turned us into one of their puppet regimes, we take pride in the fact that we were able to preserve our independent identity.

In the last few decades alone, nationalism has become a political absolute at whose feet millions bow their heads to worship. It appears that in a world rendered godless by secular aspirations, nation-worship has become a new religion for the masses. Just look at the frequency with which the words "ratriya" and "rastrabadi" appear in the slogans of all and sundry political groups. Its power to excite us into a Dionysian frenzy requires that every political pretender, from royalist to republican, pay lip service to it. In 1960, a king disbanded a democratic set-up in the name of preserving the Nepali "rastra." Since then we have fought many political battles in the name of the same idea. But why is it that nationalism has become such an indispensable category for Nepal's political classes? What purposes does it serve and to what ends? The time has come to debate our obsession with nationalism even if the debate might offend the sensibilities of some of its blind devotees.

Let us admit at the outset that, like nationalisms everywhere, Nepali nationalism, too, has its merits. Psychologically, it provides us with a sense of shared purpose that makes us feel part of something larger than ourselves. Our psyches, made insecure by the onslaught of a modernity we have yet to master or fathom, try to find moorings in what has been sometimes called the safety of an "imagined community." Nationalism provides us with a crutch to lean on during our travel through uncertain times. Many among us fervently believe that our commitment to an abstract idea of the nation will restore us to our ancient glory, much of which is imagined in retrospect. Our attachment to the nation is a form of identification that promises to ground us in a secure sense of collective identity.

Politically, Nepali nationalism has always been a



If we fight unthinkingly in the name of nationalism, all we will get is a country with a fragmented ethno-political map, a divided civil society, and a paralysed nation-state. These things will do more harm to the survival of the Nepali nation than any actual Indian, Chinese or American threat.

form of resistance to the dictates of meddling foreigners. In the short term, it sensitises us to the dangers of unequal treaties and other forms of contractual relationship that exist with one of our bullying neighbours. The longer view is that it motivates us to fight for the country in time of desperate need. Many among us have, for a long time, feared India's game plan in Nepal. We fear that sooner or later India is going to create a situation that will allow it to get what it wants from us, including our independence. In its most politicised form, our nationalism is a sign of our readiness to fight and resist that possibility.

If an extreme brand of nationalism is a political asset in time of danger, it is easy to ignore that it can also be a serious liability. First, like religious fundamentalism, nationalism is a strong code of belief, which means that, in its attempt to unite the country

around a single imagined idea, it also divides us along various ethnic and racial lines. For instance, it divides us into *pahadi* and *madhesi* factions, since the more we talk about a specific language-, culture- and colour-based national community, those who do not share in the values of this community feel as if they have been excluded from the life of the nation-state. It also divides us along ideological lines because as long as nationalism is seen as an absolute, good thing, there are going to be groups who want more and more of it. Soon those who take a hard line position on it begin to impose their worldview on everyone else. An artificial line gets drawn between "us" and "them" to be policed by extremists of all types. When this happens, nationalism stops being an ideology directed against meddling foreigners. Instead, it becomes a source of political strife *within* the country.

LETTERS

QUESTIONS FOR BABURAM
After reading your interview with Baburam Bhattarai (#51), I have some questions for him:
Can you define your norms for a New Democracy? Will it be a multiparty system or partyless? Will there be courts or will it be your cadre? Can people protest against you if they do not like your policies?
Can you elaborate your land reform theory of "land to the tiller"? How is it different from Comrade Madhav's *kranitkari bhumisudhar*? How can you produce more if you fragment farms?
What does "national capitalist relations oriented towards socialism" mean?
You want to accelerate the process of industrialisation. Then who will till the small farms? Or you will bring foreign labour for industries?
You say your party will not be like the JVP in Sri Lanka. If there is no parliament, what will be the structure of your government?
You claim you have great public support. Can you prove this without guns?
Your answers to these questions are very important because, as you say, you are soon going to attain your goal of establish a Peoples' Republic. If you can ensure a new free society where people can develop freely without terror,

we may even support you.
"Kiran" *Tripureswar*
The anti-monarchist Maoists are leaving no stone unturned to capitalise on the popular grief following the royal tragedy through such dubious means as cooking up apocryphal stories about what was transpiring between the Palace and the Maoists before 1 June. Dr Baburam Bhattarai even goes so far as to claim that the then King Birendra and his family feared for their lives!
Dr Bhattarai knows that dead men tell no tales and so he can get away with the most outlandish lies vis-à-vis his party's tentative contacts with the late monarch's slain younger brother.
Anupama Ghale *Kalimpong*

on earth would a Nepali official be worried about a Chinese exit stamp? Where else could we possibly come from, but from Tibet? He finally accepted a gift of \$50. Shame. Then the immigration in Kathmandu wanted \$30 for processing our entry visas. We paid, there was no other way.
Other than that, we loved Nepal.
Roberto Eugster *Switzerland*
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
Kabindra Pradhan's comments "Do we need a Ministry of Agriculture?" (#51) could be true about every other ministry. There is no sector left untouched in this country by this virus. But agriculture investment has fed our growing population, even though fiscal investment in this sector is not in proportion to GDP contribution. Agriculture production is not just land expansion, it is crop productivity, crop diversification, commercialisation, entrepreneurship, industry and export earnings. The ministry is not responsible for all these. Rather, it is a change of factors over years: technologies and services, strong political will, resource allocation, institutional makeup, inherited social making and (let's not forget) nature itself. Every other ministry is similarly buffeted by the conflicting

demands of donors, politicians or bureaucrats. If we don't need a Ministry of Agriculture then we don't need any other ministry either.
Kishore Sherchand *Lazimpat*
KING BIRENDRA FOUNDATION
This is to pitch for a King Birendra Foundation. Unlike the BP Koirala Memorial Trust, which is funded by a foreign country, let a part of the royal inheritance be bequeathed to set up such a foundation, and let's not take a paisa from foreign donors. The Foundation could set an example by displaying Nepal's rich spiritual, cultural, and dharmic traditions to the rest of the world. And more importantly, strive for social justice within Nepal. In the memory of King Birendra let us do this ourselves and let us do it well.
Daniel Gajraj *Kathmandu*

FAITH AND DIGNITY
After six months in your country it is time for me to return to my own. Despite the unforgettable events I have witnessed in these past historical weeks, I leave with a warm assurance of the Nepali peoples' intelligence and honesty. When asked about 1 June I will begin by recalling how the people mourned their epic loss with admirable faith and dignity.
Lindsay Kaplan *United States*

ROLPA'S BITTER LESSONS
The recent deployment of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) in Rolpa and its quick withdrawal without any reported or unreported achievement is a mystery which time may unravel. However, the face-off between the army and the Maoists did anything but confirm the adage that "any action has an equal and opposite reaction". The only reports carried by the media, government and private, indicate that three RNA men were wounded and three of its helicopters were pretty badly damaged in shooting. There were no reports of Maoist casualties. Were there secret, unreported clashes in which Maoists suffered casualties, or were there only RNA casualties? It is naive to suggest that the critical press coverage is because of ignorance. The reasons are the remoteness of the area and the government's news blackout.
In an insurgency, military force ought to be applied surgically rather than abrasively, keeping in mind the principle of minimum force. An objective analysis of the event would show whether military force was applied properly. Finally, even if the government is fully



aware of the variety of military options and applications available to it, tanks and artillery are rarely used in a counterinsurgency operation against your own countrymen.
Gyan Jung Thapa
FAILED
It is strange that in all the discussion of SLC results, no one has said the obvious—that this year there was a serious effort to stop cheating, so the proportion that "pass" with the help of such expedients was proportionally less. With rampant cheating, pass percentages were always dubious. I have been involved at every level of Nepali education for 21 years and there is only one major problem with it. The children with peak learning ability, those of primary-school age, are not given the best-trained, best-paid, most able teachers. Instead, English teachers who cannot speak or read a word of English, maths teachers who don't understand place value struggle, often bravely, to teach these children. They have no role-model, only their own similarly poor primary school experience, and no training in primary age teaching. Give children a happy, exciting time in their first three school-years, and SLC will be an open door.
C Stone *Thapathali*

by BP GIRI

The Valley's Big Three ask: what can we do for our cities?



Patan, with its unexpected green patch

As local elections near, the municipalities of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur want to spruce up their cities and bring in more revenue.

RAMYATA LIMBU AND SALIL SUBEDI

When Kathmandu mayor Keshav Sthapit goes to the polls next year, he will have a few feathers in his cap, including the house numbering system the city began last month and the land-pooling project in Naya Bazar. By far the largest and most successful land-pooling project in Nepal—similar government initiatives in Gongabu bombed—some happy householders are bound to give the mayor their vote. Upon donating about a third of their land towards the development of necessary infrastructure like roads and parks, some 1,569 plots (some which already had houses) were temporarily acquired and developed in a planned manner with the participation of the owners.

The mayor of Bhaktapur, Prem Suwal, also remains fairly popular with his constituents. Suwal, who narrowly escaped a bullet at a tense protest after the palace massacre, has always stressed that his first priority is to listen to the plight of each of his townsfolk.

The disagreement of Bhaktapur residents over raising the entry fee to the old city from \$5 to \$10 this January has been put aside as the conservation work undertaken by the municipality with the funds raised has been running smoothly under Suwal. In fact, Bhaktapur is close to actually booming—the town is setting up its own engineering college.

One of the recent boasts of both cities has been their relatively young, forty-something

mayors. Lalitpur prefers the air of understated authority its elderly mayor, Buddhi Raj Bajracharya, lends the city as it weathers a difficult transition. Lalitpur sub-metropolitan area gossip has it that Bajracharya might not contest this time if the two factions of the left wing he represents cannot unite. This may be why he is constructing a gate on the already-congested Bagmati Bridge—so people remember him, for better or worse.

His city of artisans has been collecting more revenue since the

tourist entry fee was introduced in January 2000, but there is some concern about how the funds will be utilised.

The necessities of life

In nine short months, Kathmandu municipality has laid 15 km of new road, 20 km of stormwater drains and one km of river training works. Patan's most visible public utility work is, unfortunately for its residents, the patchy repair work on some streets. Ramesh Chitrakar, the burg's deputy mayor, admits they

have some way to go: "The only real example of such work is probably the sewage menace in Kumaripati. This time around, we used concrete slabs to solve the drain that overflowed and annoyed commuters every monsoon." The mayor's office is keeping its fingers crossed.

Of the Valley's three cities, Kathmandu has probably the most ambitious public utilities plan: it is called the Municipal Infrastructure Improvement Project, a mouthful that includes upgrading and widening roads,

improving drains, constructing pedestrian overbridges, and placing those helpful green and white traffic signs in the historic city centre.

Through the dust, Kathmandu residents have grudging words of praise. "We need a doer like Sthapit," says Kishore Rai, a daily commuter. "He's extended the roads in the most unlikely places, and improved the infrastructure. Like the overhead bridges, they're really convenient." The bridges, the result of a private-public partnership, represent a major victory of Sthapit's tenure. "He's the first public figure who has involved the private sector in development," says an observer.

Money raised from advertisements painted on the bridges on the western corridor of Tundhikhel have paid for the construction of similar bridges on the eastern flank. The public private partnership has also flowered in unlikely parts of the city where private enterprises have sponsored traffic islands as part of a greening initiative. But, Sthapit's men and women of ideas seem to have deserted him, and there's no guarantee any of this will continue.

If Kathmandu has roads, the old centres of Bhaktapur and Patan have something pretty unbeatable: spring water from the stone water-taps and wells. In Patan, it is estimated that one in three courtyards has a traditional form of water supply. Of the fifty stone water-taps in Patan, 25 are still in use, and there are numerous wells. In Kwalkhu, for instance, 25 houses get natural

spring water for 12 hours everyday.

Construction and streets aside, all three municipalities face one large, smelly common problem. Waste. All the old world charm of Bhaktapur cannot mask the stench emanating from the heap of garbage moulding on the eastern side of town near Golmadi and Palikhel. The town's sewage spills out, for all to see, at the Hanuman Ghat south of the town centre, and there is an interesting collection of mostly non-biodegradable trash piling up on the banks of the towns small river along the Sallaghari and the Arniko Highway. Municipality officialdom says a solution is imminent, if only they can have complete control over the Waste Management Department's project. Lalitpur and Kathmandu, meanwhile, are getting ready for a bit of an argument—over whether or not Bungamati is a good site for trash disposal.

Some say the Kathmandu Municipal Corporation (KMC) has a slightly easier, more clear-cut job, because its needs and responses are more modern—the KMCs immediate concern is dealing with urban influx, which leads to sprawl, squatter settlements, waste management and environmental crises.

But Kathmandu municipal officials are quick to point out that they are as committed to conservation efforts as Bhaktapur and Patan. Sthapit's vision of transforming Thamel and Kathmandu's core city area into a cultural showpiece might



Kathmandu, and its alarming urban sprawl

require another term or two in office, and transforming Dharahara into a leisure spot with a garden and a café didn't work out. It seems that the two stone lions he's left in Kathmandu's Darbar Square will remain, sturdy emblems of his support of the arts and heritage.

The old and the new

Unlike Kathmandu, tourist revenues are a major source of income for Bhaktapur and Lalitpur, at least part of the reason they're so keen on the conservation of heritage sites. Bhaktapur's entrance fee hike was called outrageous by some, but it appears to be deterring few visitors, and the extra revenue is used in education, health and other community development projects in the municipality. It certainly hasn't hurt Bhaktapur's new Rs 150 million municipally-supported Khopa College, which

plans to start its Bachelor of Engineering program in the autumn.

Patan, in comparison, is having some trouble. The Rs 200 entry fee visitors have had to pay since January 2000 is said to go towards the management and restoration of the municipality's heritage sites. Mayor Bajracharya's estimation that within five years the funds generated will be enough to renovate and convert Patan's into a world heritage site is taken with a pinch of salt. Patan citizens say it is more realistic to campaign instead for three categories of heritage sites—world, national and local.

Dilendra Shrestha, president of the Patan Tourism Development Committee, claims that even he is not familiar with the logistics of the plan. "We don't know exactly how and when the funds are going to be used,"

he says. "The municipality has to prioritise its tasks," he adds, arguing that charging an entry fee and wondering what to do with it will only take you so far. "We have to first transform Patan into a compulsory destination in Nepal, make the experience of coming here more intense," he says.

Budgeting and planning based on tourist revenues works in Bhaktapur because it is already a must-see. Patan is getting there, but slowly—the Patan Museum, which saves it from being "just like Basantapur," is a big plus.

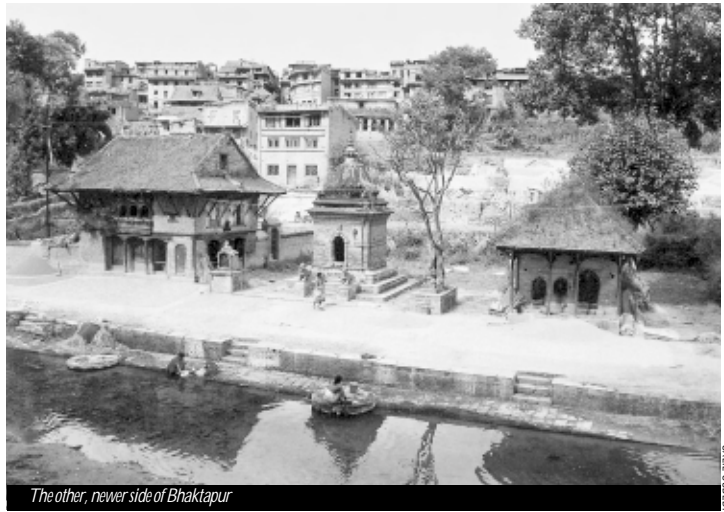
But there's another side to this discontent: residents in the area see the municipality collect the fees, but complain that their streets are still dirty and lined with hawkers. The hawkers, curio sellers for the most part, think the municipality cannot simply come and periodically take their earnings and chase them away—in all three districts they say they will be around, no matter what, so the municipalities might as well find a long-term solution acceptable to all sides.

All three organisations seem to be realising that community participation is key to any city preservation or revitalisation programme. If in Kathmandu Mayor Sthapit gets business involved, Mayor Suwal tries to get residents enthused.

Bhaktapur's municipality charges *chulo kaar*, a household tax of Rs 1 every month from every house.

In Lalitpur, the mayor's office is trying to get people excited about the establishment of a museum detailing the ethnic life of Patan and the celebration of the annual Mattaya festival. They're optimistic about getting these projects off the ground.

"The people of Lalitpur are remarkable. Whatever the occasion, about two-thirds of our residents get out and participate. Their will to get involved is our greatest asset," says deputy mayor Chitrakar.



The other, newer side of Bhaktapur

Shisir Prasad Manandhar, acting chief of Kathmandu municipality's Protocol Department, says that Kathmandu is slowly becoming a city of immigrants. "Bhaktapur and Patan have smaller, more homogenous populations, and a concentrated core area. Kathmandu is home to thousands of urban migrants whose pressing concern is making money, not caring for the city," he says. "This makes conservation and urban planning in Kathmandu difficult."

Mine's bigger than yours

Of the Valley Big Three, Bhaktapur is the smallest (6.88 sq km), Lalitpur (15.47 sq km) is in between and Kathmandu is the largest (50 sq km). All attained their present configuration in 1482, when King Yakshya Malla decided to divide his Malla kingdom into three cities for his three sons.

The Malla kingdom may have been weakened by this, but the three cities were imbued with a strong competitive spirit, that displayed itself mostly in architecture. That continues to this day, but with less sanguine results. Now we have the Contest

of the Gates. The latest is the construction of an entry gate to Lalitpur at the Kupondole Bagmati bridge by the Lalitpur

municipality. An example of total lack of imagination that one can only hope will die a silent death. ♦

MARTIN CHAUTARI WRITING RETREAT FELLOWSHIP

Martin Chautari invites applications for writing retreat fellowships for authors working on book-length manuscripts. Fellowship rewardees will be housed, for a period of 4-6 weeks, in a semi-rural site conducive to serious reflection and writing. The purpose of the retreats is to give authors a chance to complete or develop manuscripts. Genres and fields of writing of the manuscripts are open. The manuscripts may be in either English or any of Nepal's languages. They may focus on any topic of relevance to Nepal. The nationality of writers is open. The deadline for application is September 15, 2001. The retreats will be held in winter 2001/2002. All interested parties please contact Martin Chautari, Thapathali, Kathmandu for application forms and further information.

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HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Road to ruin



I can't resist the lure of the open road, and so I Hate Kyoto.

a basic human right, cars are us! That's the North American motto and it's why we hate Kyoto. Most major oil companies are also based here, and we produce a fair bit of petroleum ourselves. Never mind that oil, like money, is a stateless global commodity. Somehow we see it as ours to

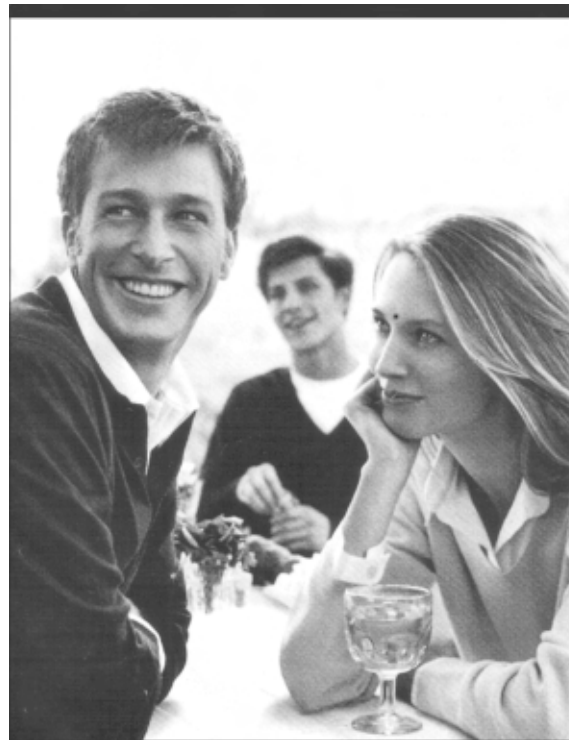
do with as we please.

Of course, the fact that we generate a lot of our electricity from coal fired plants feeds our addiction to greenhouse gas emissions too. And then there are these long, cold winters and our propensity to heat every corner of our vast houses as to emphasise our wealth and stature as consumers. All these play into our opposition to Kyoto.

Environmental concern in North America, aside from the excellent work of activist groups like the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, is very much limited to aesthetics and doing little things that please us. The excellent women of WEPCO—back home in Lalitpur—would be pleased to know that we sort our rubbish, recycle and compost our organics. But ask us to limit consumption to save the planet and we roll down the car window and flip you the finger as we drive by.

Oh, I've tried to resist the allure of the open road. And I've been reading about coral bleaching and other deleterious effects of global warming. I've even tried arguing in favour of Kyoto with friends and fellow vehicle addicts. All to no effect. They see through me and they know that I've been converted. I am one of them and I Hate Kyoto.

Once normal life resumes in Nepal—riding my bike, walking the children to school, driving my small, clunky car just a few times a week—I know that I'll be chastened and regretful. The opportunity to consume vast amounts of the world's limited resources and poison the planet at the same time has receded until the next time I return to these shores. By then, I suppose Kyoto will be dead and the temperature will be rising. All because of people like me. ♦



An Awesome August at Radisson

Chef's Special Homemade Ice-Creams

Chill out this summer with Chef Ghosh's incredible creations. Ice-creams like Butterscotch with butter scotch sauce & amaretto biscuits. Rocky Road Ice-Cream with cookies & roasted nuts. There's even something for you weight watchers!

Gueridon Special

An irresistible demonstration of Chef's Specials prepared on a trolley especially for you, right before your very eyes.

The New Menu includes Minted Red Snapper Fillets, Pannapen Tenderloin Steaks etc. Olive Garden 6:00 p.m. - 10:30 p.m.

Bubbly Brunch

By popular demand the Bubbly Brunch is here to stay! A lavish buffet with unlimited flow of sparkling wine. In addition, a special treat for kids. NRs. 999/- nett. per adult Mrs. 499/- nett. per child under 12 Every Saturday : 11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.



Coffees for Connoisseurs

For all who really care about the coffee they drink, satisfy those cravings with the World's Best Gourmet Coffees at The Fun Café.

The Corner Bar

Cocktail of the Week : featuring various exotic cocktails every week
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Lazimpat, Kathmandu.
Tel : 41 181 8, 421888
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www.visitnepal.com/radisson
Owned by Oriental Hotels Ltd.



Speciality Homemade Pastas

Olive Garden the Italian Restaurant features Speciality Pastas in August. Authentic Italian Style Homemade Pastas like Ravioli, Tortellini, Gnocchi, etc. 3rd-19th August, 2001. 6:00 p.m. - 10:30 p.m.



Scheme/scam

A glossy brochure is turning up everywhere. The cover shows a red mud house with an intricately carved wooden window, a little girl carrying her brother smiling shyly out.

The vibrant colours, the innocence of childhood, the allure of poverty—the pamphlet could be from any NGO, INGO or aid agency promising to eradicate poverty and develop Nepal.

It isn't. It is for a "pyramid scheme," introduced into Nepal by notable members of Kathmandu's economic elite.

A year ago, an Italian scheme, called Pentagono, started doing the rounds of Kathmandu NGOs, INGOs and business houses. It promised easy money—all you had to do was buy a Pentagono certificate for \$120 and sell it to three more people for the same amount. You sent a third of the money to Italy, deposited another third into a Pentagono member's account, and kept the rest for yourself.

One early recruit was Archana Karki, an editor at ICIMOD, and part-time activist trying to stop the Godavari Marble Quarry. Karki was amazed at the number of people participating and says she sat down to do the sums. "The monetary benefit of such schemes to the individual is great, but the collective outflow of money from the country was really high," Karki says. "And global monetary schemes primarily benefit the country of origin." Karki didn't like the fact that Nepal's hard-earned money was going out of the country and decided she had better do something about it. And she did. But not what you'd expect from an activist—raising a big fuss, writing to newspapers, petitioning the government to declare such schemes illegal.

Karki got together with six other prominent people:

- Arzu Deuba, psychologist, gender trainer and wife of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba,
- Basanta Chaudhari, of the Chaudhari group, also member-secretary of the Pashupati Area Development Trust,
- RK Manandhar, a businessman who runs the Image Channel, K.A.T.H. 97 FM and Motorola's Nepal office,
- Komal Prasad Ghimire, legal advisor for Soaltee Hotel,
- Shanta Bahadur Mallia, who owns a printing house and Lazana restaurant, and
- Krishna Prasad Sigdel, an environmental journalist and owner of Nepal Cable.

Together, they registered a business



modelled after the original Pentagono. They called it Samrakchhan—as in, an organisation that would look after your savings, and set up a posh office in Jawalakhel.

Samrakchhan works just like Pentagono. You shell out Rs 9,000 and are given three certificates with your name in seventh position. This gives you the right to sell three certificates yourself, for Rs 9,000. Of the money you get from each new recruit, you need to deposit Rs 3,000 into Samrakchhan's account, another Rs 3,000 into the account of the first person on the list, and you get to keep the remaining one-third. If you sell all three certificates, you recover your initial investment and move up to sixth position on your recruits' certificates. As this scheme progresses, you are told, more people buy, sell, and move your name up. And when you reach the top of the list, you could get up to Rs 6.56 million. And you can check your position and how much money is due to you on Samrakchhan's website (www.samrakchhan.org).

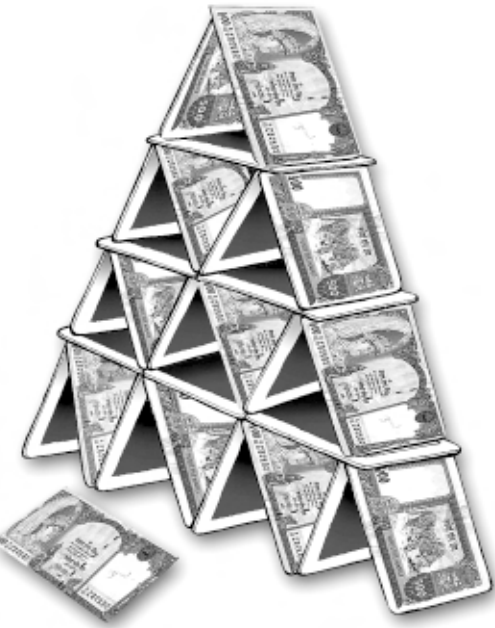
Simple, really. All you have to do is get more people to buy into the scheme.

The United States Federal Trade Commission (a US government body that evaluates and warns the US public about quick-money-making schemes) and the Internet-based pyramid-scheme alert.org define as a "pyramid scheme" any organisation in which members obtain monetary benefits primarily by recruiting new members—rather than by selling goods and services to the public. By this definition, Samrakchhan is a pyramid scheme—a get-rich-quick fantasy.

When a new recruit is sold a certificate for a pyramid scheme, he is sold a Rs 6.56 million dream. As news about easy money and high returns spreads, and as members realise they have to sell to get their money back, more recruits are drawn in. Except for administrative expenses, the organisation does not have to invest a single paisa. The returns to investors are paid out of the money received from those who invest later.

For Samrakchhan to deliver, there has to be a never-ending supply of new investors. Let's do the numbers and play this to the final, seventh level. Once you've sold the idea to three people and collected from them, you're safe and can just wait for your name to move to the top of the pyramid. At best, the three people you sold the certificates to will sell to nine more, the nine will sell it to 27 more, and the numbers will grow exponentially. The chain ends for you when the 2,187th person sells his certificate, and you will get up to Rs 6.56 million. Add it up, and you see that for one person to get to first place, 3,280 people must be involved in the scheme.

Each of these chain-completing 2,187 people has been told that if they continue the chain, they will each get Rs 6.5 million. If 2,187 people are to receive the jackpot, nearly 7.2 million people will have to be involved in the scheme. For 6,500 people to win, Nepal's entire population would have to play.



There's a new economic scheme to guarantee large-scale social unrest. And it involves the cream of our society.

And Samrakchhan will make Rs 9.8 million from just one completed chain, at Rs 3,000 for every person playing. At any given time, there are as many possible chains as people playing. The company claims it currently has 5,000 members, which means it has already collected roughly Rs 15 million. There are almost 300 members at the top level right now, collecting money. When they graduate with their huge "earnings", Samrakshayn will have collected close to Rs 2 billion—just for organising the scheme.

Say the government decides the scheme is illegal and shuts it down, then of the 3,280 players enrolled now, 1,092 people (33 percent) have bought and sold their certificates and broken even, but 2,187 (66.97 percent) will lose Rs 9,000 each. And at this point only 0.03 percent (one person, if you are lucky) can hope to get that promised Rs 6.5 million.

Until you do the maths—which few do—pyramid schemes seem infallible. The reason they do not fail dramatically is because most people who drop out—and pay the price of the collapse—are those who join later and realise after some time that they have fewer people to recruit. Your chances of hitting the big time, are realistic only if you join early—very early. And organisers never lose. The collapse does not occur suddenly, but one person at a time, over long periods of time. Thousands will join and thousands will drop out, and each, individually and unarmed, will bear the cost of the collapse.

Archana Karki, who has been the front person for the organisation, including in a harrowing (for her) talk program on Radio Sagarmatha, does not see anything wrong with the scheme. "We've always relied on aid and grants for our development. This is different," she explains. "It is a great way of mobilising internal

resources and creating a social development fund."

Like much of Kathmandu's professional elite, Karki can masterfully play two roles—development worker and development sceptic. Samrakchhan's brochure says its mission is to develop Nepal, while providing an opportunity for individual gain. The whole scheme is couched in the language of development aid, strewn with phrases like "community development action" and "injecting a sense of pride and ownership in nation building among Nepalese citizens."

Samrakchhan is registered as a profit-making company with the Company Registrar's office in Tripureswor. However, Karki is quick to explain that the company has been set up purely with social service in mind and that the seven members of the team agreed right at their first meeting that they would not receive salaries or dividends—they would use their profits to contribute to society.

Samrakchhan's registration papers state just that it is a "social marketing" company. The only government office that seems to understand what Samrakchhan does is the Lalitpur Tax Office. The taxman's evaluation papers, photocopied and posted on Samrakchhan's notice board, say clearly that the scheme is a "lottery" and members are taxed as such on their returns. The Samrakchhan brochure proudly claims it is a tax-paying body. It just forgets to mention that it is a lottery winners' tax.

Samrachhan's significant financial contribution to society so far, besides deducting taxes from its members' winnings, has been a total of Rs 830,000 put into community development activities and Pashupati clean-up. And it gives each new member a gift hamper with locally produced pickles and snacks worth Rs 300.

Should any organisation, public or private, be allowed to operate a scheme that takes money from some people and distributes it to others, on the side raking in millions for itself to spend on philanthropic purposes? Social workers, financial and legal experts say no, but Karki argues: "Nepal does not have a social welfare fund, and as long as whoever is running the scheme is not doing it for commercial gain, society wins, and the scheme is justified."

Few pyramids schemes say outright that they are fundraising for development, but the justification for operations like Samrakchhan sounds similar across continents. People running pyramid schemes in Albania in the mid- and late-1990s, and more recently in South Africa, said they were helping lift people out of poverty, creating new employment opportunities and teaching people to prosper and be proud of themselves. In Albania the economy was brought to ruin by pyramid schemes in the late-1990s. There, and in South Africa, the authorities declared the schemes illegal. Read about it on www.pyramid-scheme-alert.org.

Samrakchhan has become increasingly popular in the last two months and if the government does not wise up, more copycat organisations like 1Uno, Smartcash, Magicman, Sambandha, PC City,

Skybiz.com, and Goldcoin, to name but a few, will jump in to fleece the public. People are starting to borrow money to play. And many in the chain argued with this writer that something in which luminaries like Arzu Deuba are involved in could never be fraudulent. Samrakchhan at least has the "cover" of development work, others are going to appeal directly to greed. If unchecked, pyramids will grow exponentially, eating into the meagre savings of more and more people as the scheme moves out of business and aid circles to campuses and schools, and keeps moving down the economic ladder to the middle and poorer class. Eventually, it will have an impact on the national economy.

Samrakchhan's promoters ignore the fact that the people furthest down the ladder, ie, the poorest, will bear the brunt of their badly thought-through exercise. This is like stealing from the poor to develop the poor. At best, its promoters were naive about their scheme. Or, they deliberately ignored the fact that it is a risky venture for the economy, and one that distorts social values like independence, initiative and entrepreneurship. Those who know economics, or do business, are aware that "something can never come from nothing." Samrakchhan's promoters, and others like them, need to recognise the questionable ethics of their ventures.

Pyramid schemes like Pentagono and Samrakchhan are inherently fraudulent. The schemes are designed so only a lucky few receive rewards. And, unlike the random pick of a lottery, only those who bought in very early can ever hope to win. All others lose. And their loss is the source of rewards to those above them in the chain. Without governmental and legislative checks, we are in danger of institutionalising pyramid schemes as legitimate free-market operations. If the government declares them illegal immediately, as it should, there will be at most 10,000 angry people. If it tarries, there may be tens of thousands of poor people affected, and they will be rioting in the streets because they have lost their money.

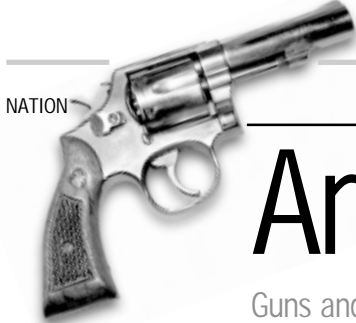
This is what happened in Albania, when the government waited three long years to declare pyramid schemes illegal. When it finally did, large-scale rioting broke out, there was arson all over Tirana. By the end of it, more than 2,000 were dead.

This is the evil genie Samrakchhan has thoughtlessly let loose in Nepal. ♦

(Manisha Aryal lives in Kathmandu and reports on the business and economy of South Asia.)



NATION



SRI BHAKTA KHANAL AND CHANDRA KISHOR

An Indian summer afternoon. A long, dusty motorcycle ride over rough roads. Our destination: Ghodshah, a small village in East Champaran district in Bihar, India. Our purpose: To buy guns—or pretend to.

All houses in Ghodshah are the same—mud walls, thatched roofs made of dried grass. A man is waiting for us outside one such anonymous house. He welcomes us, as he would any guest. He is hospitable, affable almost, as he insists we have lunch. And yet, it is difficult to be at ease.

The man is also an arms dealer, one of the biggest players in the robust weapons trade in Bihar. He shows us his wares—guns, guns more guns. He would not take kindly to reporters undercover as buyers.

Our contact in the trade had only been told that two buyers were making the journey from Kathmandu. He directed us to Ghodshah, which looks like a typical Indian village. But inside this house, all illusions of bucolic charm are shattered—rifles are propped up everywhere, over 20 pistols hang from the wall, there are instruments of violence everywhere the eyes rest.

The supplier picks up a pistol lying on the bed. "This one has got terrific aim. It has already killed 10 people," he tells us proudly. "But it is not for sale." That was his personal favourite. The price tag for the pistols on the wall: 1Rs 3,000 each. And, the man says, ever the canny salesman, "If you do not like any of these weapons, then give us a model and I'll make that too. But it will cost you a bit more." All illegally produced weapons look identical to those made in ordinance factories, down to a copy of the brand name.

We say we will think it over and leave, trying not to hurry.

Our next stop is another small village, Kusmahawa. The man we are to meet is a teacher in the local *madrasa*. He is less friendly, but more

blase: he lays out his stock of weapons on the verandah outside his house. The recent elections in Bihar had exhausted his supply, and all he had for the moment were a few 0.38 calibre revolvers.

"How much do these cost?" "Six rounds, 1Rs 17,000, they're made in the ordinance factory in Mungeir (Bihar)," comes the terse reply.

"That's a bit expensive, isn't it?" "Fixed prices. Sent four of these to Hetauda, six to Kathmandu, got orders for four more from Rautahat—all this month."

"Can this be delivered to Kathmandu?"

"I don't do it, but it's easy." He shows us just how easy. "Strap the revolver and pistol around your thigh, wear loose trousers. It's that simple."

"We will buy a lot of these," we lie. "But first we have to show these models to our friends."

The *madrasa* teacher even allows us to take pictures of the weapons, for our "friends", naturally. We had a copy of *Guns and Ammos* magazine with us to convince him we were serious buyers. We edge out slowly, promising to buy ten revolvers. He comes charging after us, shouting like a carpet seller in Thamel, "Hey! Wait! If you find these are too expensive, I'll take you to another place."

Kundawa, Chainpur, another dealer. Our interactions are getting increasingly brazen. This one is in a street shop right in the town's main intersection. The dealer casually places a 9-mm on the table. "1Rs 45,000."

"That's very expensive."

"Well, it is fitted with a silencer. There are cheaper ones."

"How many bullets will you throw in?"

"As many as you want. Give us a model of the bullet and a month. We'll get you whatever you want. The hunters from Hetauda, they buy their bullets from me."

"Can you deliver the weapons to Kathmandu?"

"If you pay more. I've just sent

Arms and The Men

Guns and ammunition flow freely from Bihar to Nepal. Freely and very easily.

Only last year, Ram Bahadur Yadav, the District Development Committee (DDC) president of Laxmipur Kotwali in Bara, was implicated in a case involving the illegal possession of four pistols. The district administration is still processing the case against Yadav, a UML member. Achyut Mainali, general secretary of the Bara UML district committee says the party is investigating the case. Also last year, Triloki Choudhary, another DDC and UML member was suspended from the party after he was found to be involved in a criminal case.

Indian arms dealers flock into Nepal during elections, especially in Rautahat district. Dr Banshi Dhar Mishra, UML MP, says, "Like members of other parties, I was also offered an AK-47 at a throwaway price."

Govind Chaudhary, a former MP from the district, says as many as a third of all voters are threatened with guns during elections. In the last elections such easy access to firepower was reason for trouble in 26 polling centres, and 36 incidents of booth-capturing. That was the time the Nepali Congress saw it fit to ask the Jaiswal brothers, Pawan and Manoj, of Phulbahariya, Bihar, for help with arms, ammunition, and muscle power. The UML decided to go for the Jugal and worked with Rajababu, an opponent of the

Wherever we went in northern Bihar, in areas adjoining Nepal, it was easy to meet dealers, all of whom were ready to procure and often deliver any kind of weapon—from home-made country pistols to AK-47s. Such weapons, we found out, are delivered to any part of Nepal a buyer wants. In tarai districts like Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Sunsari, Morang, Jhapa, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Siraha, Sarlahi, Kapilvastu, and Banke, buyers are plenty and deliveries, routine. "Are you willing to pay 1Rs 60,000? I'll deliver a factory-made Browning pistol to you in Kathmandu," one dealer told us.

Buying peaks just before elections, in both Bihar and Nepal. Not just pistols and revolvers, even bombs of all types are in demand during election-time. And now, not surprisingly, they even reach the Maoists. Addressing a high-level police meeting in April 2000, then prime minister GP Koirala admitted that the police is also involved in the illegal weapons trade. He said that police posted at border check posts accepted bribes in exchange for allowing arms to enter Nepal. Amar Singh Shah, Deputy Inspector-General, the highest ranking police official in the western sector, in Nepalgunj, wrote in a letter to the prime minister that although these weapons are not manufactured in Nepal, it is difficult to stop the flow of arms from India. Even the army posted at the various border checkpoints has found it difficult to control the trade.

Earlier people in border areas used to keep weapons on hand to protect themselves against wild animals and Indian dacoits. Now, their objectives have changed—weapons are owned for criminal and political purposes.

The earlier administrations also played a role in arming people in the tarai. Set a thief to catch a thief, they believed, and released armed criminals from prison. While this did help control the run of dacoits from India, the flip side was that many of these armed criminals entered the Panchayat mainstream and some even became Pradhan Panchas, like Lallan Mishra, aka Surya Kant Mishra (from Sarlahi), Rekha Thakur from Hardia, Bara, and Jadolal Mahato Koiri from Katahariya, Rautahat.

The use of weapons during elections in the tarai districts increased after 1991, reaching its worst during the mid-term elections of 1994. Dr Shekhar Koirala, a nephew of former prime minister Koirala, was caught red-handed with a weapon in a voting booth in Koirala's constituency. Rameswor Rai Yadav, then a Sadbhawana Party MP, was caught carrying weapons in Sitamari, Bihar and even locked up for a few days. The case filed against him is still pending in the Indian courts.

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Bohara, of the Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis in New Delhi, there are over 1,500 illegal arms manufacturing centres in Bihar, and Nalanda and Gaya districts have the most factories. The presence of the PWG (Peoples' War Group), other Maoist outfits, the Ranbir Sena, and other armed groups has contributed to the massive growth of Bihar's illegal weapons industry. Moreover, Bihar has many ordinance factories and many workers began fabricating weapons as part-time source of income.

In an attempt to control weapons possession in Nepal, some months ago the government called on all people who owned an illegal firearm to surrender them to police in exchange for a pardon. The Home Ministry has no idea whether the amnesty has been effective. They say there have been some enquiries about the programme, but no weapons have been deposited with them yet. ♦

(This article first appeared in slightly different form in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16-30 July. Translated by *Amp Adhikary*.)

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT), a registered charity, aims to work with the people of Nepal to improve their health. It has been working with remote communities in the Eastern Development Region of Nepal for over 30 years in partnership with the Ministry of Health, international and local NGOs, local committees and communities. It currently runs programmes in TB and leprosy control, community health and development and community based drug schemes. BNMT has an annual budget of approximately £700,000 and approximately 100 staff in Nepal. BNMT has recently undertaken an organisational and strategic review and the newly recruited Director will be expected to take on and to lead the senior management team in implementing the outcomes of these reviews.

BNMT Director in Nepal

BNMT is seeking to appoint a new Director to take overall responsibility for the development and management of all aspects of BNMT's work in Nepal. The successful candidate will have a proven track record in managing/leading small organisations and substantial skills and experience in strategic development and planning. He/she will also need to demonstrate the following skills and attributes:

- a substantial experience of working in development and/or public health programmes in developing countries, preferably South Asia
- proven understanding of development processes
- excellent personal leadership qualities
- must be fluent in English and Nepali

Starting salary: £16- 20k dependent upon experience

Closing date: Friday 7th September 2001

Proposed interview dates: Week of October 1st 2001

Start date: November/December 2001

Duration: Three years with possible extension

For further details and application pack, please send a request to Mr. Shiva Acharya, Personnel Manager, BNMT, P.O. Box 9, Biratnagar, Nepal or email: hrdm@bnmt.org.np. Mr. Acharya will then forward you an information package by email, post or fax as per your request. Please do not submit CVs.

Registered Charity number: 255249

Preference will be given to Nepali national candidates and women.

High tariffs, bad economics

It was expected for over a year and now it has happened. All users will pay an average of 10 percent more for power from mid-September onwards (for power use in the month of Bhadra). The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has also published rates for Time of Day (ToD) power use, something it began half-heartedly last year and has not been able to aggressively promote so far. ToD metering is available only to "medium" scale users and not households.

Even though the ToD idea is a sound way to increase end-use efficiency, the plan has not taken off because the NEA wants to purchase meters itself—for the well-known benefits of making bulk purchases—instead of allowing customers to do so and certifying those meters.

The recent tariff increases are related to donor demands on the NEA to improve the rate of return on investment, self-financing ratio, and revenues, in order to be allowed to use a loan for rural electrification. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), which is giving the loan for rural electrification, is generally singled out for demanding the tariff hikes—whether it has the right to do so is a different issue. But economists say the NEA's tariffs have less to do with the bank's demands and more with its own lack of business-skills. The ADB, they say, is simply doing what banks do to clients who don't know how to run a business.

The electricity we don't use during off-peak hours is wasted because it cannot be stored—the NEA will not consider selling it at, say, half the present rates to daytime users, and increasing the volume of sales, and so restricts ToD metering to a small group of users, despite the growth of this market segment. The battery-run Safa tempos, for instance, could be ideal customers for the NEA's off-peak power. Safa operators have tried to interest the NEA—and failed. NEA staffers said there was no point because Safa tempos aren't important enough. "The Safas contribute only Rs 30 million to the NEA's roughly Rs 9 billion revenue," said one official who did not wish to be named.

As for households, many are using less power than they used to, having switched to alternative fuels for cooking and heating. Their pay-off from the NEA: higher tariffs for less kilowatt/ hour usage.

Au revoir, monsieur?

French investors in the Indo-Suez bank are said to be looking for buyers to sell their holdings and pack up. Newspapers have said deteriorating law and order situation, shrinking opportunities for continuing investment in Nepal, and the omnipresent red tape are said to be reasons. This is not first time the French investors have threatened to pull out. A year ago they said they would quit if government did not let them increase ownership. Permission was granted. Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat said foreign banks can own up to 75 percent of stock, up from the existing 50 percent. But that decision may have come too late for Indo-Suez. The Rastriya Banijya Bank owns 15 percent of Indo-Suez, and sources tell us Indo-Suez has been trying to buy out RBB for some time, while the government does not want to sell. The Rastriya Beema Sansthan owns another 15 percent and the public 20 percent. Indo-Suez officials did not make themselves available for comment.

Euro-1 three-wheeler

Hansraj Hulaschand have begun marketing Bajaj Auto's new four-stroke three-wheeler in Nepal. The authorised distributor of Bajaj vehicles in Nepal says the three wheelers are more cost effective compared with their competition—the gas- and battery-run three wheelers and micro buses—and are also clean, since they comply with Euro-1 emission standards. A company press release says the price of a new Bajaj is Rs 225,000, including VAT and other taxes, almost one-third the cost of a gas or battery-run three-wheeler. The company says the new vehicle is an alternative to the two-stroke machines the government plans to phase out later this year.



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Commitment, and a lot of luck



Parliament's agenda makes for one long laundry list.

After intra- and inter-party squabbles, a new government has been formed. Whew. The cabinet has fewer people than expected and more days than anticipated for the swearing-in. Even so, Nepalis are pinning their hopes on this government. There have been positive moves—the declaration of ceasefire and initial legwork for the initiation of talks with the Maoists bode well for the future.

But the Beed thinks the government has more economic worries than political. The previous government sat through a whole session of parliament without managing to conduct any business. And the state paid the emoluments parliamentarians expected even if they were not doing their job. Hopefully, they will be suddenly overwhelmed by good sense and work overtime this session to clear the backlog that built up as they threw chairs at each other and treated the streets as debating and sparring grounds.

There is important work remaining, many a legislation promised by finance ministers of governments past has been left to languish. They need to be brought up and discussed, and decisions need to be taken. August members of the House need to be gently reminded that they are there to understand and analyse bills, and then they need to act on their understanding and put the question to rest by either passing the bill or throwing it out. That is the only way forward for us as a country.



At the very least, our representatives must be able to admit that most of the technical matters brought to their kind attention goes over their heads. Of course, this might often involve trusting the judgment of their peers on the other side of the political fence, and this, the Beed suspects, is often the problem. We all need to realise that laws don't always need to be individually vetted by MPs, as voting nearly always toes the party line. Once the technical committees of all parties have examined and approved a piece of legislation, the House should adopt it, and not waste time hearing individual cries and whinnies. Democracy provides the right to speak, but not to delay beyond all reasonable limits.

Among the almost one hundred legislative amendments that parliament has delayed acting on, there are some vitally important ones including: the New Income Tax Act, the amendment to Nepal Rastra Bank Act, the VAT Act, the Institute of Chartered Accountants Act, the Foreign Exchange Management Act, the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act, the Commercial Bank Act, the Finance Company Act, and the

Company Act.

New hydropower policy and related laws have also been left on the backburner for too long, as have laws relating to the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority. We've been promised regulations pertaining to bankruptcy in this year's budget, and laws to strengthen regulatory norms for private schools, nursing homes and hospitals—with any luck, at least one of these will go through. The laundry list includes new Acts designed to shore up the Pension Fund, auditing, the formation of a regulatory board to monitor water supply, a Drinking Water Supply Act, amendments to laws relating to Securities Board and Stock Exchange. Whew again. It is a wonder that the country is managing to stagger along with so many vital matters left in the balance.

Can our political parties display commitment? They should bear in mind that their survival and growth depends on the growth of the economy. If economic activities dry up, contribution to political parties will also dry up. A vibrant economy means more funds for political parties. Self-interest, if nothing else, ought to spur them on.

These are interesting times in Nepal—it is not just the government that must prove its dedication, but also the opposition. Good, luck, Deuba. ♦

Readers can send their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

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The pros of plastic



BINOD BHATTARAI

You can roll them, twist them, soak them and use the edge as an emergency toothpick. They don't crumple or rip, and they are water-resistant, so sweaty palms don't stain them, and immersion in *panchamrit* does not destroy them. And, they harbour fewer germs. None of this new improved polymer business detracts from the traditional magic of these banknotes—they're still good, hard cash.

An Australian company has been trying to convince Nepal's central bank to start using plastic money for several years now, but without success. Officials from Note Printing Australia (NPA) were in town earlier in the year to make yet another pitch to Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) officials.

NRB did not say yes, but it didn't reject the idea either. Instead, officials brought up technicalities like the tender process to avoid having to take a decision quickly. NPA officials, surprisingly, are in no hurry. With close to a dozen countries—Bangladesh, China, Thailand and Indonesia in the neighbourhood—already trying out plastic in some or all denominations, they think sooner or later, Nepal will, too.

"It's the best possible way to ensure your notes last longer and appear decent throughout their lifetime," says Steven Wong, Asia vice president of Note Printing Australia. To demonstrate, he takes out a 100-yuan bill from his wallet, dips it in a glass of water, and twists and crumples it. At the end of this punishment, the note unfolds perfectly and lies flat on the table, with barely a crease.

A subsidiary of the Australian Reserve Bank, the NPA is the leader in polymer banknote technology. Wong's pitch for polymer goes something like this:

- It is soil resistant, and therefore cleaner;
- It is non-porous and so does not absorb liquids like sweat and beverages, which makes it last longer in humid conditions;
- It is resistant to tears as the polymer substrate is more robust than paper; and
- It is a green, recyclable technology.



Will we have the much-discussed polymer banknotes any time soon?

Possibly the best part of the new cash is its durability—polymer is said to last four times longer than paper. The NPA's promotional material claims that the polymer successors to Aus\$10 paper bills, which lasted no more than eight months, have a life-span of at least 32 months, close to three years. Australia has been using polymer for currency of all denominations for the past decade. "Polymer is best for the denominations that circulate the most," explains Wong. The Thais use polymer for their Baht 50 banknotes, the Bangladeshis for the Taka 10 bill, the Chinese for their 100 yuan note.

The new technology also has enhanced security features, such as the notes' unique transparent window, which cannot be reproduced by photographic devices, and additional printed security images/features on the window. Additionally, says the NPA, all security features possible on paper are also available on polymer. NRB officials don't doubt the new technology. They're even willing to consider that the new banknote may have cost benefits vis-à-vis paper

need to be considered:

- Plastic money does not fold easily, and many Nepalis do not carry a wallet;
- NRB has already phased out notes for ones and twos, and is introducing coins;
- Most note-sorting in Nepal is done by hand, and paper is perhaps better suited to that;
- Cash is stored in stapled bundles here, and plastic notes are difficult to staple. Besides, the staple hole could be the place where that near-impossible tear starts;
- The cost of phasing out paper and printing plastic works out if there is volume—Nepal might not have a large enough number of notes to be recycled;
- The law says notes out of circulation have to be burnt, so the recycling argument may hold only after amendments; and
- Access to security paper is restricted, but anyone has access to plastic.

Notes in high circulation in Nepal last no more than a year at best. Smaller denominations, like the Rs 1, Rs 2, Rs 5 and Rs 10 notes, those sometimes-nauseating scraps that bus conductors, cab drivers and vegetable vendors hand back to you, last no more than six months. The NRB generally has new notes of these denominations ready just before *Dashain* and *Tihar*. On average the bank prints about 20.5 million pieces of fives, as many ones, about 20

million pieces of tens and about the same number of twenties every year. One—perhaps the most compelling—economic argument for trying out polymer is its durability, which would eliminate the need to spend money on printing money every year. "Polymer notes are said to be durable for seven-eight years in ideal conditions, and that could mean savings on printing in the long run," agrees Panta. The flip side: an initial printing cost that is two-and-a-half to three times higher than that for paper. But, adds Panta: "If our own cost-benefit analysis shows what the company says is true, there is no reason not to try it out." Trying this out with smaller denominations also

The other problem is that the law mentions banknotes printed on paper as legal tender, and no official wants to risk interpreting that broadly to also include plastic—not, they say, in times where every government decision comes under intense by the scrutiny anti-corruption body and the Public Accounts Committee. Will there be amendments made to the law? It's too early to tell, but as if in anticipation of the possibility of plastic money, the draft of the new NRB act says "material" where it earlier said "paper."

And legislation isn't the only problem, say NRB officials. Plastic money, too, has disadvantages that

makes sense because there is less incentive for counterfeiters to try to reproduce the money.

Even if the logistics work out on paper, this will be a dodgy move. Every year the NRB spends about Rs 100 million on printing new banknotes—switching to polymer will mean a big loss for some businesses. There's also the question of kickbacks, an unspoken, but generally assumed cost in any government or semi-government contract. Still more people will lose out on these.

If we do decide to go plastic, it will be quite some time after the new central bank act is ratified. That itself may or may not happen in this session of parliament. In the meantime, our filthy notes will have to keep on doing what they do—spreading germs and falling apart. ♦



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Godavari green

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY
Kings, dictators, prime ministers and presidents have all turned gardener here. But never in the monsoon though. Leeches, people say. Slushy ground, they complain. But once you've tried it, it is difficult to imagine a better time to be come to Godavari.

When the morning sun rises from the distant mountains to seep into Kathmandu Valley, the first to be lit up in its warm glow are not the tall buildings. The city sees light a good half hour after the goddess on Phulchowki, 2715m high, 14 km southwest of Lalitpur. Even the rain likes the area—Phulchowki and her base, Godavari, receive the most rainfall in the Valley. It is truly a blessed place. No surprise, then, that even a Rana prime minister decided to build himself a massive summer palace here, far from the city's crowds, heat and dust.

Imagine an area covering less than half the size of the Valley, a 20-minute drive from the city centre, with a collection of wildlife, flora and fauna to rival the best national park. We owe this fantastic getaway in great part to the vision of King Mahendra, who decided in 1962 to declare some 200 acres of the natural forest-land at the base of Phulchowki a Royal Botanical Garden. The garden is the only one of its kind in Nepal—with facilities for students and botanists, and also space for picnickers and holiday makers. "Our main aim is to enrich the garden with indigenous plants from all over Nepal, and use this collection for scientific investigation, conservation, and education," says Indira Sharma, who is responsible for the garden. Sharma, a botanist, previously spent 25 years at the National Herbarium and Plant Laboratories right next to the garden.

It is impossible not to lose oneself in the garden's verdant peace, but there is plenty to astonish the observant. Among the lush undergrowth and the murmuring brooks that pass through the garden there are approximately 4,500 specimens of flowering and non-flowering plants, some of them endangered or rare like the *Cyathea spinulosa*, commonly called the tree fern, which is eaten in some parts of Nepal. As Sharma pointed out, not all species in the garden are native,

some have been collected from far-flung areas of Nepal, and others are the result of seed exchange programmes with botanical gardens around the world. There are different greenhouses to display exotic varieties of cacti, like the incredible, rather ugly three-headed cactus *Echinocactus grusonii*, tropical plants and over 90 species of orchids. The area is dotted with little Japanese-style and rock gardens, to enthrall the over 100,000 visitors who make their way to the garden every year.

Entrance to the garden comes cheap, Rs 5 for Nepalis, Rs 10 for SAARC citizens and Rs 25 for others. This doesn't include a guided tour, but you do get brochures and maps, and all the plants are labelled. It's great fun to lose yourself and find interesting things, instead of having a structured visit with a guide droning in the background. The garden is open to the public everyday from 9am to 4pm in the winter and an hour longer the rest of the year. "We come here to escape the noise of the city. It's so quiet and peaceful," says a couple, watching their young children turn cartwheels and examine a funny looking shrub.

With its innumerable nooks, crannies and stunning vistas, the garden is the star of many photo shoots, especially

dance sequences in Nepali films. Entrance, camera fees and location royalties bring in around Rs 1 million annually, all of which goes into the central coffers. With an annual development budget of just Rs 2.5 million, it is always a struggle to keep the place running

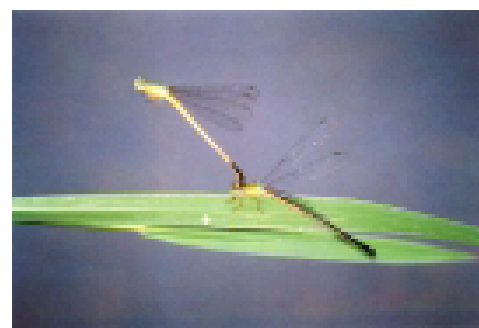
smoothly. Most of the funds go to pay the daily wages of the 25 staff, all drawn from the local communities, who try to keep the garden clean and save the plants, especially the endangered species from rowdy visitors and flower freaks who want to take some of the magic back home. "Educating

the visitors about garden ethics is a chief concern for us," Sharma says, complaining about all the litter her team has to clear after every weekend picnic, not to mention re-rooting uprooted plants. The strain of maintaining such a large space is starting to tell—the boundary walls are



There's no better monsoon escape in all the Valley than Godavari, slush, leeches and all.

ALL PHOTOS: SALT SAGES



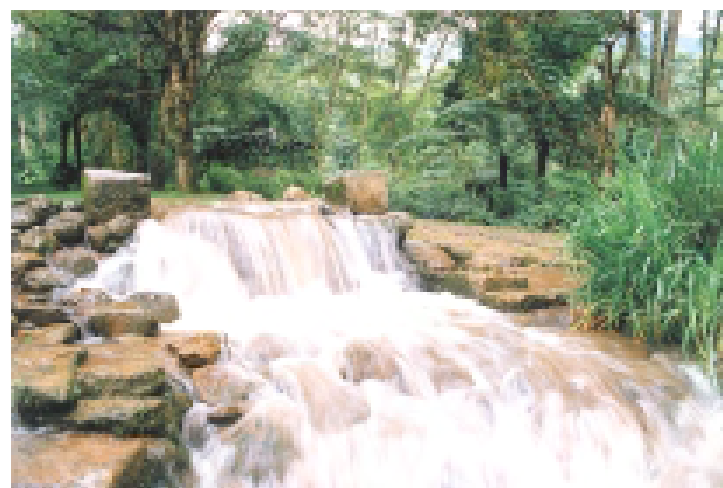
crumbling, toilets are always locked up if they're not smelling, and picnickers like to leave behind testimonies of their visit. Or maybe they think trash is a rare and refreshing treat for the birds and animals.

Things are changing, but very slowly. There are some new additions like the Botanical Information Centre just inside the gate, an exhibition hall displaying the variety of plants that can be bought in the garden's nursery, and a fairly good restaurant overlooking the garden. The north side of the garden, which houses a research and awareness-raising initiative called the Conservation and Educational Garden (CED), has been given a complete facelift. It was specially constructed for students, researchers, and naturalists. The main, or southern part, of the RBG is natural vegetation growing at its own pace, and that's perhaps the best part of the garden to see nature at its rejuvenating best, a relief from the scare of development that assails your senses the moment you

step out of the woods.

The CED has about 90 specimens of trees, 26 kinds of shrubs, 38 herbs, and eight climbers. There are medicinal plants, edible plants, poisonous ones and decorative ones. There are the fabled species said to yield timber, which was used in the construction of some of the Valley's best-known temples and monuments. Entrance is only Rs 2, and this section has a lot more open space, so if you just want to sprawl and read, or keep an eye on your (well-behaved) children, this is not a bad place to be.

If you've ever had a burning desire to know all about Nepali flora, go to the National Herbarium and Plant Laboratories. The herbarium houses around 100,000 mounted and 50,000 un-mounted plant specimens collected from all over the country, covering some 5,500 of the 6,500 known species. Here you can see endangered species like the Tetra centrum, commonly known as "the living fossil" or find out which of the nuts you find in the jungles are



edible when you finally make that break and leave the city.

The herbarium and the garden work closely with each other in cultivating and studying endangered plants. "Our work involves researching, collecting and preserving samples of plants from all over Nepal, and trying to establish their economic value," says Dr Mahesh Adhikari, the herbarium's senior research officer. Besides the botanical museum and a library of journals for students and researchers, the building also houses five hi-tech plant laboratories working on anatomy, cytology (the study of plant cells), mycology (fungi), phycology (algae), and tissue culture (breeding healthy plant specimens with the aid of artificial nutrients).

Anthropologists would also

do well to spend some time at Godavari—the area has cultural and religious significance for many communities. The chief goddess of the Tamang people—actually called *Phulchowki maal*—resides on the hill's summit, and on its slopes there are numerous Hindu temple complexes like the Naudhara and the Panchdharma, whose nine and five taps are said to spout water coming from as far as the Godavari river in India. Every 12 years, Panchdharma hosts a huge fair, attracting thousands. The last one was in 1992 and the next one is scheduled for 2004. For those who want to celebrate Holi, the festival of colour and water, without the sprays and rowdy crowds in Kathmandu, Phulchowki might be the best getaway. Hundreds of Tamangs

of carp or trout.

With all these options and such a picture postcard setting, it is no surprise that Godavari is perhaps the number one weekend spot for thousands of Valley residents every year. The local community has benefited from the garden and the natural wealth of Godavari—they've got jobs on and off, but more importantly, they've seen that preserving their natural surroundings pays off eventually. Community forestry has been a great success, and the forest cover on the hills surrounding Godavari, which seemed a lost cause a decade ago, is back, together with the birds and animal life. "Most of the development here has been because we have the garden and the school," says Jhamke Nepali, who is from the area and worked at St Xavier's School for over 25



from the surrounding hills converge at her summit to sing and dance the day away.

For a day trip or weekend, Godavari could be an end in itself, or the starting point of numerous hikes, like the slippery three-hour climb up Phulchowki or the circuits that lead to Panauti, Bhardev, and Lele villages. Camping isn't allowed in the garden, but there are quite a few spots to try around the hills. Or, you could do a spot of bird- and wildlife-watching in the garden and surrounding hills—there are 256 varieties of birds like the Kalij pheasant and the Racket Tailed Drongo, 300 variations on the butterfly, including the coquettish Paris Peacock and the silently beautiful Luna Moth. And, if you're very stealthy, you could even spot a barking deer or a leopard. For the lazy among us there's a few quiet afternoons to be spent fishing in Lam Kunda's small pond beside Panchdharma for a delicious meal

years. With the proceeds from the shared forest's products, the community has managed to build a road right through the Godavari village, and their children now study at St Xavier's.

Whether Godavari's future will be as sanguine, however, is another matter. The marble quarry just beside Phulchowki poses a major threat to the area's delicate ecosystem. Green activists have been trying for years to have it shut down, but it seems unlikely they will succeed. And increasingly, there are hotels and restaurants sprouting all over, and the well-heeled are building their villas closer and closer to the garden. Even here, there's no escaping cement dust and the sound of building.

Winter may traditionally be the favourite time to visit Godavari, but these days, the monsoon isn't bad either—the greenery soothes tired eyes, and the rain washes away the dust. It is still Eden. ♦

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ANALYSIS



The poor need IT, whether to sell eggs or in the wake of natural calamities. Email made relief efforts easier in the Honduras in the wake of Hurricane Mitch.

Several high-tech leaders, including Bill Gates, question the value of information technology (IT) for developing countries, especially when compared to priorities like food, medicines and schools. In a sense, they are correct: anti-virus software is no substitute for vaccines. But Mr Gates, also an eminent vaccine philanthropist, and his fellow doubters are selling their industry short by overlooking the many things IT can do for the world's poor.

For starters, IT can make markets work. Much of economics is concerned with how markets take the things we have—labour, raw materials—to make things we want. How do millions of independent, dispersed consumers tell millions of independent, dispersed producers, exactly what they want, so collectively they don't make too many clocks and too little bread? Market information, especially prices, is the key.

In well-functioning economies, when there aren't enough eggs to meet demand, their price increases. Farmers, seeing profitable opportunities, breed more hens to produce more eggs. People want more eggs, and like magic, more eggs appear. Just as important, farmers earn more income and consumers pay less for eggs. Whether Wall Street or West Africa, information makes markets work.

Unfortunately, things don't work as well in poor countries. They often lack even basic communication technologies, so signals don't travel and markets don't perform well. This is how IT can help.

In developing nations, most adults are employed as farmers or labourers. The farmer's primary interest is how much he can sell eggs for. While prices often differ across villages, the farmer typically knows only the local price. So even if, say, the urban price is higher, he doesn't know to send his eggs to the city. Nor does he realise that it is profitable to breed more hens. He misses opportunities to earn more income, and urban consumers face excess prices.

Simple technology can help. Visiting Bangladesh recently, we saw farmers using cellular phones to call several villages and cities before deciding where to sell their products. They were spending 20 cents to call because, by one farmer's estimate, they would make 50 percent greater profit when selling their eggs. By pursuing the

highest price, the farmers send their eggs to where they are valued most, lowering the price for consumers. This is the market at its best, with a little technology greasing the wheels.

How does IT help labourers? In rural villages, permanent employment relations are rare. Most employers' labour needs vary greatly from day to day, often unpredictably. So on a typical morning, workers gather in their village centre and employers come by to hire them. Often, hours are wasted searching for brief employment opportunities, or worse, workers in one village may stand idle while employers in nearby villages can't find enough workers.

Bangladesh again provides evidence of how technology helps. Observing workers from Grameen Bank install a village phone, one of us clambered up a tree to help hang an antenna wire. Not surprisingly, a foreigner on the verge of a plunge drew inquisitive on-lookers.

Asking why so many men were idle, we were told there was no work in the village that day. After completing the installation, we called Grameen officers in nearby villages. Within minutes three onlookers had farm-work. Those men earned wages that day, and the farmers who hired them produced more. More sophisticated technologies like networked computers could enhance matching and reduce search time, a single click revealing job opportunities or prices in all relevant locations.

In both examples, IT delivered real economic benefits, farmers and workers earning more income. With that income, they can pay for more things they need, like food, medicine or school fees for their children.

On a larger scale, the effects would be profound. Instead of helping just three workers or farmers, a communication kiosk in every village in the developing world could put extra money every day in the pockets of the three billion people surviving on less than \$2 a day. The only sustainable way to end deprivation is to enhance earnings possibilities. IT can do exactly this, with the invisible hand of the market becoming a helping hand to the world's poor.

Of course, the poor need more than just markets. We must keep investing in health and education, especially in creative ways like those of Mr Gates' foundation. But it's not an 'either-or' proposition, because IT can provide in these areas as well.

The digital provide

For the world's poorest, information technology is the gift that keeps in giving.

For instance, many public health problems can be prevented or treated through information dissemination, often at lower cost than treating the problem afterwards. IT is the best way to deliver such information rapidly and at low cost. Further, putting health clinics online could raise their productivity and allow for remote diagnostics and information where doctors or medical references are in shortage.

There are as many valuable

applications for education, including distance access to libraries, textbooks and instruction where such things are scarce, as well as for governance, community and social mobilisation and commerce. IT is the gift that keeps on giving. Once in place, we can transmit information for a variety of uses, at little additional cost.

Recent advances dramatically lowered the costs of technology and access. The limiting factor now is that

we're not thinking about IT's real value, the 'I', so it's not high on the development agenda. It should be. Never before has there been a single tool with the potential to provide so much to the poor, in so many ways. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Robert Jensen is Professor of public policy at the John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Richard Zeckhauser is Professor of political economy at the John F Kennedy School of Government.

by ROBERT JENSEN AND RICHARD ZECKHAUSER



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ANALYSIS

by MARK LYNAS

Hot Air

Bonn - As the chairman's gavel banged down on the table at the international climate change negotiations in Bonn, Germany on 23 June, cheers of relief and jubilation erupted around the hall. Some of the loudest cries came from the environmental groups assembled at the back, many of whom had campaigned for 10 years.

"We did it," delegates said in disbelief. "We rescued the Kyoto Protocol," EU environment commissioner Margot Wallstrom beamed, referring to the 1997 agreement in Japan to cut 'greenhouse gas' emissions. "I think we can now go home and look our children in the eye." It was an emotional moment and no one, including the world's media and environmental groups who had pushed hard for a meaningful treaty, wanted to ask awkward questions.

The so-called Climate Change Treaty is now more riddled with loopholes than a piece of Swiss cheese. It does nothing to cut greenhouse gas emissions, which scientists say contribute to global warming and climate change. In fact it will allow emission levels to climb above projections. It's all in the figures, as revealed in a pre-conference analysis by Greenpeace International, one of the campaigning groups. The Kyoto deal gave industrialised

countries a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (principally CO₂, carbon dioxide) by five percent below 1990 levels by 2008-12. But it didn't say how. So since 1997 participating countries have been attending annual meetings to decide on the rules for implementing the Kyoto Protocol. One group, led by the US and including Japan, Australia and Canada, has worked diligently for years to weaken the targets. These come under the general heading 'flexible mechanisms' and were pushed through on the grounds that they would help ease the pain of CO₂ cuts in gas-guzzling rich countries.

One 'flexible mechanism' allowed industrialised countries to trade emission rights, so that those meeting the targets could sell what are called 'carbon credits' to those falling behind. But by an historical accident Russia's economy has fallen apart, hugely reducing its industrial greenhouse gas emissions. Today Russia potentially has a huge number of carbon credits to sell on the world market, known in Kyoto-speak as 'Russian hot air'. Then there are 'sinks', which allow countries to count CO₂ absorbed in forests and agricultural land toward their targets in the same way as reducing the amount of CO₂ coming out of a factory chimney or a car exhaust. Add together all the 'sinks' provisions and



FROM ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Kyoto Protocol is toothless—so why is everyone supporting it?

it turns out that the original Kyoto targets for industrialised countries are no longer a cut, but a rise of about 0.3 percent.

It gets worse. The US, which produces almost a quarter of the total world emission of greenhouse gases, with one of the highest per capita emission rates of CO₂, has decided to pull out of Kyoto altogether. Without the Americans ratifying, emissions from all the industrialised countries (including the US) could rise by between 9.4 percent and 11.6 percent above 1990 levels by 2008-12. That is even higher than business-as-usual, predictions for which vary from 6.8 percent to 10.2 percent.

Why are mainstream environmental groups now supporting an agreement that could be substantially worse than the one they dismissed as 'junk' ('Friends of the Earth') and "a very bad deal" (World Wildlife Fund) at the

November 2000 climate change conference in The Hague. Greenpeace International's climate policy director Bill Hare admits the deal is weak. "It's going to require the EU to do the majority of its action at home or very little will happen in practice," he says. But, Hare insists, "The benefit of the Kyoto Protocol is that it is a legally-binding protocol to build on."

Greenpeace has promised to "actively campaign to get governments to forgo the use of loopholes and instead reduce greenhouse gas emissions through comprehensive domestic measures".

Meanwhile, the threat of climate change looms. Scientists from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change say cuts of 60 percent or more in CO₂ emissions are needed to halt global warming. Without it, there is a real danger that as polar ice caps continue to melt and ocean temperatures rise, global warming may spiral out of control. ♦ (Gemin)

COMMENT

by WALTER WILLETT



The burden of obesity is shifting to the world's urban poor.

Visitors to the US are often struck by the obesity visible everywhere. In Europe the old stereotype of the 'Ugly American' is being replaced by the caricature of the 'Fat American.'

The proportion of obese American adults increased from 12 percent in 1991 to 18 percent in 1998. Another large fraction of America's population is also above a healthy weight but below the formal definition of obesity. Half of all Americans are either overweight or are obese by WHO standards. Obesity rates in children are also rising fast. This obesity epidemic is global, and includes many East European and developing countries. The rates for being overweight and obese in Mexico, Kuwait, and in parts of South Africa are similar to or exceed those in America. In Russia, surveys show 30-35 percent of women and 10-15 percent of men are obese: in the former East Germany obesity rates are 20-30 percent for women and 15-20 percent for men.

As obesity spreads it is changing. It is no longer the luxury of the rich, but an affliction of the poor. In affluent countries obesity is now two to three times more likely in people with the lowest educational attainment. Although genetic factors influence the likelihood of obesity, they cannot explain such massive increases in so short a period of time. Eighty percent of the world's people now have access to sufficient food—an accomplishment not without its drawbacks. The urban poor in developing countries show that high rates of obesity occur when limited physical activity is combined with simple starchy—not necessarily

fatty diets. Weight-related health complications and the cost of treating them are enormous.

Obesity is a function of social change: urbanisation, convenient transport, sedentary lives, and the consumption of mass-produced high caloric foods. In principle, if each individual just exercised regularly and was careful about caloric intake, obesity would be uncommon. But because low levels of physical activity and over-consumption are deeply imbedded in our lifestyles, individuals acting in isolation face many obstacles. Fighting the obesity epidemic will require individual and institutional initiatives:

- nutritionists must provide improved dietary advice and make it accessible to all;
- health care providers can do more to counsel patients about the importance of minimising weight gain as adults;
- schools and businesses can require daily physical activity, serve healthy meals, and integrate health education into their routines;
- parents can limit television watching, not buy soft drinks, express love without high-calorie sweets, and be good role models in their diets;
- governments can provide facilities for safe walking, bicycle transportation, and recreation.

Although we willingly spend massive amounts of money treating the diseases and health complications that arise when so many people are so overweight, we are reluctant to invest in strategies to prevent the underlying problem. Preventive strategies are particularly important in poor countries. During the next 30 years, UN demographers predict that two billion people will be added to the world's population. The large majority will be in poor urban areas of developing countries, places where the largest increases in obesity are being recorded, and where expensive medical care is difficult. These cities typically expand without including safe facilities for recreation. Such facilities are not expensive to include when streets are being created, but are costly to build retrospectively. They should be required components of all urban planning.

The shift of the obesity burden from the rich to the poor in Western countries demonstrates that knowledge and the ability to act upon it are important. There are whole countries—Holland and some Scandinavian countries—where including bicycles and pedestrians in urban design encourages activity.

Obesity is excessive body fat, but this is difficult to measure directly. Body mass index (BMI), a measure of weight corrected for differences in height, is most commonly used to define obesity. BMI is computed as weight (in kg) divided by height-squared (in meters). The WHO has defined a BMI of 30 or greater as obesity. Overweight is defined as a BMI of 25 to 29.9. Although the health risks associated with being overweight—diabetes, heart disease and some cancers—are less than those for obesity, they are still substantial. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Walter Willett is professor of medicine at Harvard University.

Eating by labels

BRUSSELS - The European Commission's proposed regulations on the tracing and labelling of genetically modified food and feed (GMOs) fall dangerously short of preventing their unauthorised release into the EU market, warn environmentalists. The Commission last week proposed lifting a moratorium on new approvals of GMO plant varieties imposed by the EU in 1998 while setting out what it called the "world's most stringent" rules on controlling and monitoring their release. To take effect the plans must be approved by the 15 EU member states (the Council) and the European Parliament. The new regulations would set up a centralised approvals process for authorising GMOs for food or feed and a detailed system to trace them throughout the food chain, from the farm to the grocery store. Labels would be placed on goods to the effect of: "This product does not contain but is derived from GMOs." That could apply, for example, to eggs from chickens and milk from cows that consume GMO feed. Greenpeace welcomes the introduction of a more thorough labelling regime, which includes products derived from GMOs such as oil and starch in food, as well as animal feed, which is the bulk of present GMO imports into the EU. But, says the group, the new regulations include a "dangerous loophole," with the risk of cross-pollination and contamination of non-GMO and organic crops still present, as the Commission proposes a one percent tolerance threshold for authorised as well as unauthorised GMOs. Below that threshold, their presence in a product would not need to be approved or labelled. Friends of the Earth (FoE) said the rules were a concession for the biotech industry. "All companies have to do now is say that the GMO contamination they created was 'accidental', and they get away with it," says Gill Lacroix, Biotechnology Coordinator at FoE Europe in Brussels. Scientists, politicians and NGOs have frequently questioned the EU Scientific Committee's favourable opinions on GMOs over the past years. (IPS)

Money for drugs

WASHINGTON - The US administration's \$700 million counter-drug aid programme for Colombia and the Andean region has made it through the House of Representatives. The controversial programme, meant to bolster Plan Colombia, will now be reviewed by the Democrat-controlled Senate, where the Foreign Operations Subcommittee led by Senator Patrick Leahy will ask some tough questions. Like many House Democrats, Leahy wants some of this money diverted to fight infectious diseases in Africa and other poor regions.

The Andean Initiative covers Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama. It comes on top of a two-year, \$1.6 billion programme designed during President Clinton's tenure to support Plan Colombia, an initiative to train, equip, and advise Bogota's military and police forces to help them take control of the major coca-growing region of Putumayo in southern Colombia and eradicate coca and opium poppy fields there. The Plan has been strongly criticised in the US and abroad because virtually all the aid was to assist the Colombian army, which has a poor human rights record and a history of collaboration with right-wing paramilitary forces responsible for most of the mass killings in the country's multi-faceted civil war. Neighbouring countries were concerned about the "spillover effects" of Plan Colombia, with US-trained special army battalions moving across borders, and thousands of peasants being displaced into Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru. The new initiative attempts to deal with these concerns. The bulk of the proposed \$400 million aid to Colombia will support army operations, but about \$150 million dollars is for economic, humanitarian and development purposes.

The package is the most controversial part of the \$15.2 billion fiscal 2002 foreign aid appropriations bill. The total amount of the bill, amounts to about 0.1 percent of the US GDP, the smallest proportion of aid to GDP provided by any major Western country and close to the lowest level since World War II. (IPS)



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Enemies of China



Mao's economic system is finished, but his search for enemies at home and abroad continues.

“Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?” Mao Zedong asked in 1926. It is a useful question to keep in mind in the wake of the “friendship treaty” just signed between Russian President Putin and China’s President Jiang Zemin.

Fear of enemies and the need to destroy them remains overpowering among Mao’s heirs. It explains the imprisonment of members of the tiny Democratic Party, of Catholics loyal to Rome, of Protestants, Buddhists, and Muslims who resist supervision by the Party’s Patriotic Church, the oppression of Tibet and the hunting down of Falun Gong adherents. Beijing’s leaders justify this by linking supposed internal enemies to “outside forces” seeking to undermine Communist rule by “smokeless warfare.” If enemies aren’t crushed, they say, China’s fragile stability will shatter.

This fear infects foreign China-

watchers too. A bomb explosion or peasant riot makes them speculate about whether the survival of the Communist Party is threatened. China’s best-known investigative reporter, political prisoner for 22 years, ex-Party member and an exile in the US, where he teaches at Princeton University, Liu Binyan interprets this best: “What disrupts unity and stability is the leadership’s own performance... the Chinese people have lost confidence in the socialist system and the future of the nation... gunshots, bombings, arson and railway derailments are a form of revenge for the injured and the oppressed.” Foreigners say China is no longer a place of constant Maoist persecution—people eagerly curse the regime, publications, including pornography, are numerous, apparently a sign of press freedom. But nothing interpreted as “bourgeois liberalism” or organised

resistance to the regime is permitted.

The roots of this “enemy hunt” lie in the official founding of the Party in 1921 with help from the Moscow-directed Comintern. This meant immediate infection by the core Leninist/Stalinist conviction that enemies must be eliminated, and if not killed, erased from the record. In Shanghai, visitors to the building where the Party is said to have been founded are shown photographs doctored to eliminate founders who became traitors. Photographs of Mao’s funeral in 1976 initially showed his widow in mourning but a few weeks after her arrest as one of the Gang of Four, the widow and the rest of the Gang were airbrushed away. Mao and Deng Xiaoping were themselves treated as Party enemies on occasion. Deng survived three such purges, two of Mao’s making.

Mao drew blood from the start of his ascent to Party leadership in the early 1930s. Survivors, especially the widows of executed “counter-revolutionaries,” recall the pervasive fear at his guerrilla headquarters at Yan’an. In the years before the 1949 victory, Party historian Dai Qing says, Mao’s alleged enemies were accused of Trotskyism—a useful Stalinist justification—and hundreds were shot, beheaded, or buried alive. After 1949’s triumph, the enemy-hunt persisted, with successive campaigns against landlords, “Rightists,” “stinking intellectuals,” and “capitalist-roaders,” and finally the millions of “opponents of Mao” in the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution. Researching that decade it is hard to find a school whose teachers were not tortured and killed by their pupils. In 1989

came Tiananmen, or rather the almost 100 Tiananmens throughout China, where citizens called for moderate reforms. Tens if not hundreds of thousands were arrested. The government still treats as semi-criminals the parents of students killed in Tiananmen.

The Party fears its own past. Its begetters, a tiny group of conspirators, harassed by their enemies, and often at odds among themselves, scrambled through civil war and Japanese invasion to seize power. If mistakes were made, the victims, even if dead, could be “rehabilitated” later, with official absolution: “The Party makes mistakes, but only the Party can correct them.” During the Cultural Revolution Mao formed a committee to deal with those who “opposed the Chairman.” Hundreds of politburo, central committee, and upper-party members and perhaps two million others, were “examined.” In prison, their every act was recorded, including “raising their legs, lifting their arms... eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, gnashing their teeth... laughing, sighing... talking in their sleep.” The committee’s meetings were chaired by Premier Zhou Enlai, once regarded as the Party’s only saint. Thirty-five years later, no one outside its circle of corruption respects the Communist Party; but after decades of violent, often bloody treatment of “counter-revolutionaries” and “class enemies”, the Chinese people have every reason to fear it. ♦

(Project Syndicate)

Jonathan Mirsky is the author of numerous books on China and a former East Asia editor of the Times of London.

DARE TO BE HUMAN

MARI MARCEL THEKAEKARA IN NEW DELHI

“We need a Mandela in Gandhi’s land.” That is the slogan of an Indian campaigning group with controversial plans to take caste to the World Conference Against Racism in South Africa later this month.

Dalits, the ‘outcasts’ of the caste system, are saying enough is enough. “Fifty-four years of freedom has not changed centuries of oppression,” campaign leaders declare. When the group was in Geneva lobbying the UN, an Indian embassy official asked: “Why do you want to wash our dirty linen in public?” Martin Macwan, convener of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, responded: “First, you’ve admitted the dirty linen exists. Two, that it needs to be washed. Now who’s going to do the washing? We don’t have a choice, do we?”

The campaign began three years ago on 10 December, World Human Rights Day, a year after India celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence. India’s Golden Jubilee in 1997 was filled with rejoicing and pageantry. Yet for India’s estimated 160 million Dalits that had a hollow ring. Independence has not made much difference to them—they remain the largest population ever to suffer discrimination because of birth and descent.

Despite radical legislation and a constitution written by a Dalit—Dr BR Ambedkar—the caste system has survived. India has legislation stronger than any racial discrimination laws against those who commit caste offences, but since most police officers, the judiciary and the executive are from the upper castes most violators escape punishment. Protests from the lower castes have been around since independence, but the more militant Dalit movement drew inspiration from the 1960s US civil rights movement.

In the past decade some organisations have fought for Dalit rights using the human rights platform. Leaders behind the campaign highlighting atrocities committed against Dalits have been touring India with the fervour of a major election campaign. The campaign sparked a nationwide petition, a ‘black paper’ on India’s broken promises to the lower castes, and public

hearings where Dalits spoke of the sufferings inflicted on them for aspiring to normal human activity.

The struggle has captured international attention, as organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch join the Dalit cause. The decision to present the issue at the World Conference Against Racism has fuelled debate within India. The Indian government says caste is not race. And many eminent Indian anthropologists and academics agree, fuelling a heated debate. Dalit supporters are furious. “This is not a college debate or an academic exercise,” Macwan said in a press statement. “We’re dealing with real lives. With discrimination of the worst sort, day in and day out. On a population that’s murdered and raped for daring to be ‘normal’ like their upper caste neighbours. The conference is about discrimination in all forms. And caste is the worst sort of discrimination in human history. It is far worse than apartheid. Far worse than slavery.”



Cobbler, Dalit, human.

Dalits in India say: caste-based oppression should be treated like racism.

The debate may be moot anyway: the upcoming conference has already expanded its mandate to include “descent- and occupation-based discrimination.” Dalit academics argue that apartheid was a political construct, which could be dismantled with the toppling of the political regime in South Africa. But caste is a social construct with religious, cultural and social sanctions and is entrenched as one of the oldest systems of human oppression. The government says India has the most radical constitution ever produced—pro-poor and written to eliminate poverty and discrimination. Dalit activist lawyer Mirmrothji retorts: “None of it has been implemented. Dalits are still murdered, raped, burnt to death routinely, and with impunity... We are not talking about temple entry. We are not even fighting for intermarriage or eating together. We are merely asking for the most basic human rights: stopping upper caste people from killing, raping and humiliating our people—just because we dare to want to be human.” ♦ (Gemini)

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from p. 1 ➡

There has been talk that you have met Maoist leaders. What is your assessment of what they want?

We have not had formal talks—that is the responsibility of the government—but we have been communicating through contacts. We can analyse trends based on their actions, their behaviour towards our party. Right now we don't think the Maoists are willing to stop where people think they will. Listening to their speeches, reading the editorials in their newspapers, seeing their behaviour towards opponents, we cannot trust them wholly. We cannot say exactly what they want or where they will stop right now.

The police lost the battle a long time ago and in Rolpa, the army didn't fight. How do you think the state can protect its citizens from renewed violence should talks fail?

If those running the state are corrupt and incapable, nothing can protect us. The army has to be under the government, there should be no doubts about that in a constitutional monarchy. It the army does not listen to government, the government should tell parliament what is happening. If it is about interpreting the Constitution, that too can be handled by parliament which even has the power to change it. There must be trust between the parties in parliament, the prime minister and the main opposition should be able to discuss the problems frankly and iron out problems. We need a dynamic government, one with vision and capable of providing sound leadership. Without that, no unit can function.

You met Deuba last week. Is he capable of providing such leadership?

We spoke for two to three hours. He is new, so it is unfair to assess him right away. He needs to do his homework well, seriously. He may listen to many people's suggestions, but he has to make decisions based on his own judgement. He should be clear about how much and who he should trust among the parliamentary parties. He has made a good beginning, but has it been well thought out?

Do you see the UML supporting the ordinance on building the paramilitary?

The law is defective, it by-passed parliament. The possible use of the paramilitary during elections is suspicious, and we cannot support the ordinance as it is.

If the process is corrected, is it possible there will be an intermediate security force, between the army and police?

We can sit down and discuss the issue.

The Maoists have three demands—an interim government, a new constitution and the institutional development of a republic. How do you see them?

All three demands are focused on ending the monarchy. Once you accept a constitutional monarch, you can make any changes within the existing constitution. You don't need a new constitution unless you want a republic. I think the idea of an interim government comes in the context of the new constitution to establish a republic. If it was only to make amendments in the Constitution or to hold elections, it could have been called differently, a joint government, an election government, or a national government, etc. But an interim government implies is that a new constitution is needed and that the basis of that constitution should be a republic. What is the government's position on this issue? If everyone wants that, if the king is also agreeable to it because he wants to go along with the Maoists, then we have nothing to say. We have three major concerns. Nation: we won't tolerate any external interference or influences in the country. Secondly, we don't want people's rights to be curtailed. Let no one be able to make slaves of people by impinging on their beliefs—a democratic, multiparty system is what we support. Thirdly, we stand for social justice. Taking into account the present power-equation and the king's commitment to constitutional monarchy, we support the system we have. But if everyone wants something else, then why not? We are essentially communists and republicans, and if everyone wants a republic, including the king, and if everyone says let us have the Maoists take over, then we would not have any problems with that. What we will not accept is any attempt to take back the rights of the people, any form of authoritarianism. ♦

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King vs Koirala

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 25 July

अस्थि

Only after the Maoists abducted 70 policemen in Rolpa was the army reluctantly deployed in Maoist-affected areas. Koirala was content with the thought that the army would be able to control the Maoists. He got the shock of his life when he realised that the army was not very keen to take on the



Girija Prasad Koirala

Maoists, and were doing little to free the abducted policemen. All opposition leaders had been demanding Koirala's resignation for some time. As the army was being mobilised, Koirala met opposition leaders and requested them not to ask for his resignation while the operation was underway. He wanted to be free of harassment for some time at least. After he realised that the army was not taking any action, Koirala decided it was time to meet the king. Sources say the meeting did not go very well, and it was after that, Koirala decided to resign. The very next day he asked his advisors to prepare a press release and at 4pm, he went to meet the king once again. When Koirala handed in his papers, His Majesty asked him to reconsider one last time. Koirala saw no reason to reconsider and walked out of the palace.

The mechanics of fixing

Jana Aastha, July 25

अस्थि

We are told that the Prime Minister met His Majesty last Wednesday, and that the king was not terribly enthusiastic about the mobilisation of the army. The opposition was baying for the Prime

Minister's blood and boycotting parliament, the Maoists had stepped up their activities and the king was not being very supportive of him. Koirala realised his best move would be to finally resign.

The day Koirala resigned, the Indian ambassador, Deb Mukharji, went to meet Sher Bahadur Deuba at his residence. After meeting with the ambassador, Deuba went to meet a nominated Upper House MP. It is not difficult to guess why the ambassador was having tea with Deuba—he was prime minister when the Mahakali Treaty was signed and the Indian ambassador wanted to thank him for that and also request similar help in future.

About ten days before this, the Maoists had sent Deuba a letter wishing him a bright and successful future. Around the same time they also made a public statement that they would not attack anyone outside the Gyanendra-Girija clique. Deuba was receiving help from all quarters, and this helped him to become the leader of the parliamentary party. Koirala understood what was going on and all that played an important role in his decision to resign.

Ram Chandra Poudel had not even thought about resigning as deputy prime minister, no matter how difficult the situation. Then, some weeks ago, he had dinner at the residence of the chief of the RAW (India's Research and Analysis Wing) in Nepal. Immediately after that he decided to quit.

The pro-Indian RPP and Sadbhavana party, which until now were silent spectators, also decided to boycott parliament and ask for the Prime Minister's resignation.

Chakra Prasad Bastola, also thought to be close to India, said he too was in the running for prime minister, but once the Deuba-Dev connection started working, he slowly withdrew. Yet, even as the voting was taking place, he said he was prime minister-in-waiting, and would be running the country in about six months time.

Sources say that soon after he became Prime Minister last week, the Maoists called Deuba on his mobile phone. The government-called and Maoist-supported ceasefire was announced after that conversation. Jai Prakash Prasad Gupta, Hom Nath Dahal, Purna Bahadur Khadka, Chiranjivi Wagle and Khum Bahadur Khadka were present when the telephone conversation took place. All this shows just how efficiently the different factions were working, how strong their influence was.

'Alien' Princess

Jana Aastha, 25 July

अस्थि

Following the Supreme Court's ruling that will result in 30,000 citizenship certificates being annulled, a member of the royal family is finding it difficult to obtain a citizenship certificate. Princess Sitasma, the youngest daughter of Dharendra Shah, is in a tight spot.

Sources in the district administrative office say her application does not meet the guidelines set down TO issue her a citizenship certificate. Last Thursday, a lawyer representing the princess took her application form to the office and returned empty handed. The reason for the rejection: The applicant's father's name was not mentioned on the application form as is required. The lawyer said that since the father was dead, he could not come to verify himself, and the applicant's mother couldn't come either. The district administration asked the Home Ministry for guidance. The Home Ministry replied saying that since the father's name was not mentioned, it would not be possible to issue a citizenship certificate.

The lawyer then argued that in the case of Princess Puja too (the princess' sister), the father's name had been omitted from the application, and it had not stopped her being issued a citizenship certificate. Princess Puja was issued a citizenship when Usha Nepal was the Chief District Officer of Kathmandu district. The Home Ministry replied THAT had been a wrong decision.

The lawyer then asked the ministry was what should be mentioned on the application form if the father was an ordinary citizen, the mother a princess and the daughter also a princess. This one was a hard one to figure out, and at the end there was simply no decision taken, and Princess Sitasma was not issued a citizenship certificate. The application form does not have a slot for writing down the mother's name.

Lumbini drowning

Budhchar Saptahik, 25 July

अस्थि

The Indian government has started building a dam in the area adjoining Rupandehi district. This dam will displace thousands of people in Nepal. The construction is a direct attack on the sovereignty

See p. 16 ➡

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"You write the article, I will write the title."
-Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to leader of the opposition, Madhav Nepal, at a forum organised on 31 July by a human rights organisation.



Top: Golden catch
Fish: UML-MIL
Basket: Upcoming elections

अस्थि Jana Aastha, 1 August

from p. 15 ➡



Will the Lumbini complex be flooded?

and independence of Nepal. The National Democratic Students' Federation of Nepal (UML-affiliated) is calling for dismantling the dam.

The students and "experts" that had gone on a reconnaissance tour of the area tell us that Lumbini will be under three metres of water once the dam is completed. A total of 24 Village Development Committees (VDCs)—over 75,000 acres of land—will be flooded, 130,000 people will be affected. VDCs that will be immediately affected include Semara, Karauta, Raipur, Farena, Asuraina, Roinihawa, Ama, Bhagwanpu and Sipuwa. Others to be affected are Silautiwa, Bagauli, Majgaon, Bhongdi, Tharki, Sakraun and Pakaudie.

Indian sources say that the dam construction began in April and the survey had already been done in 1987. The yearly flooding of the Danab and Danda rivers affect more than 50 villages in India. To control this, the Indian (state) government decided to construct a 1-km long and six metres high embankment. Work on the embankment has been completed as far as Kunauli. After the completion of the dam, only 10 Indian villages will face flooding every year. The process of rehabilitating the inhabitants of these villages has already begun.

When plans for the dam were made public, local people protested. The government lied, telling them that a road was being built. It was only

after the project work began that the people were told what was going on. The state government in India is spending IRs 60 million on the dam.

Has Deuba learnt from his mistakes?

Budhabar Saptahik, 25 July

बुधबार

Excerpts from an interview with Madhav Kumar Nepal, UML leader *What changes do you expect the new prime minister to make?*

Let us all pray that he will bring about change. We should give him a chance. Sher Bahadur Deuba has got his chance so let him work. His last stint as Prime Minister was very bitter and unsuccessful—in that period, everything went from bad to worse. He let the rot set in. During his tenure, parliament and democracy both earned a bad reputation.

Has he learnt anything from that? We will only know once he forms his cabinet. Will he compromise to hold on to his position and form a 44-member cabinet? If he goes back to his old ways—forms a nonsense cabinet filled with cronies, starts suppressing the opposition, and simply does not work to fulfil the expectations of the people—he will definitely not be successful.

He will only succeed if he learns from his mistakes, open himself to new ways of thinking and tries to

reverse the damage done in the last 12 years. He should amend the constitution and bring about positive change in all sectors of society. He should make people realise that democracy is for the people and make decisions that will benefit the poor and the nation as a whole. He must strengthen the police and the armed forces, make the judiciary more independent and accountable. He must control corruption, punish wrongdoers, and form an all-party government to conduct elections. He needs to bring about major reforms in the agricultural sector. He must stop discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, caste, and language. He should strengthen the office of Prime Minister and introduce a system of checks and balances. If he can do all this, I will consider him successful.

The UML's one-point agenda, Koira's resignation, has side-tracked all other issues. Now that Koira is out, what will happen to those issues?

We discussed this issue and have decided how the problems of the country can be addressed. We have demanded immediate, serious and positive changes in the political, economic, social, educational, administrative and judicial sectors. We strongly believe that to do this we need to bring about changes in the constitution. This is the need of the hour. If the nation is to move forward politically, then it is vital that our proposals be implemented. We couldn't put our ideas forward because Koira refused to resign, reputation.

Has he learnt anything from that? We will only know once he forms his cabinet. Will he compromise to hold on to his position and form a 44-member cabinet? If he goes back to his old ways—forms a nonsense cabinet filled with cronies, starts suppressing the opposition, and simply does not work to fulfil the expectations of the people—he will definitely not be successful.

He will only succeed if he learns from his mistakes, open himself to new ways of thinking and tries to

and country just went from bad to worse. His resignation has opened the doors for progress and for making corrections. Now the new prime minister must work to this end. Whether he can is a different issue. He is still repeating Koira's 14-point program, when the reality is quite different now. We've presented the government with our 22-point program on different occasions. If the new Prime Minister is unaware of them, he should now familiarise himself with them.

Need to know

Drishiti Weekly, 24 July

The Delhi trip of the leader of the Sadbhavana party and the Kathmandu visit of former Indian ambassador Rajan just before Koira's resignation are important. We need to know why Gajendra Narayan Singh went to Delhi—who did he meet and what did he discuss? Why did Rajan come to Nepal, who did he talk with and about what? It is serious if the Prime Minister resigned as a result of these activities. At a recent meeting of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) Koira hinted at the influence of foreign powers. Now is the time for him to clarify matters, he is no longer Prime Minister and is free to speak his mind.

The army's behaviour is also being given as another reason for Koira's resignation. No one is able to discuss it publicly, but it is slowly coming to a head. This raises concerns not just about the army, but also about democracy in Nepal. The opposition requested the government to invite the Maoists to have a dialogue. The government has moved positively in this regard by stopping the army from making any more moves. If the army's inaction in Nuwagaon was without being directed to do so by the government, it is a serious matter. What happened in Rolpa when the army was mobilised? Did the army really misinform the government or does the government have something to hide? This has to be clarified. Who is responsible for misleading the public? People

responsible for misinformation must be identified, and action must be taken against them. Either way, that the army not listening to the government is a matter of concern. If this is why Koira resigned, then the people need to know, and Deuba must take steps to ensure the situation is remedied.

The other issue being brought up in connection with Koira's resignation is lack of support from the king on army mobilisation. Common perception is that the last meeting between Koira and the king did not go well, and Koira realised the king was not on his side. Some say this is the palace's spin on the meeting, designed to portray Koira in a bad light. Others say the Prime Minister simply wanted a way out of the situation. Here too, the truth needs to be told. If the king wanted to stop the deployment if the army, he should explain in public why he thought so. If the monarch wants to remain a constitutional monarch, the government must take responsibility for the army's behaviour. The parliament and the opposition need to monitor the government's actions and ensure it does not take the wrong decisions. It is natural for the king to take an interest in the working of government and raise questions when he sees fit. The monarch needs to co-operate with the government. If the palace missteps, it weakens itself. If such actions do not stop, this web of conspiracy and intrigue will weaken the country.



could be considered. The almost uniform opinion of Indian media professionals against the decision was: "Foreign investment is ruled out in the executive, the judiciary and legislature. Similarly it should also be ruled out in the fourth estate, the media."

Harihar Birahi, president of the Press Council Nepal says that direct or indirect foreign investment in the media can be counterproductive. "It is a duty of the government to monitor and control indirect foreign investment in media, if there has been any," he added. Birahi holds that since the media is a sensitive industry, it should be run solely through national resources.

Journalist P Kharel said that entry of foreign investment in the Nepali press is a paradox. "No South Asian country allows foreign investment in journalism. It was protested in India. There is reason to suspect the intention behind these investments, because it comes from the same country where this very practice was opposed in such strong terms. As far as the issue of nationality is concerned, foreign investment in the media in any form should be protested by professional organisations like Federation of Nepalese Journalists, the Nepal Press Council and the Nepal Press Institute," said Kharel.

(Translated by Anup Adhikary)

Pressing concern

Nepal Samacharpatra, 27 July

Media experts have criticised the government policy of allowing foreign investment in media in Nepal, fearing it might ravage our sense of nationhood. None of our South Asian neighbours and even many developed countries do not allow foreign investment in the mass media.

Media professionals expressed their discontent when the government gave the go-ahead to India's The Times of India Group to invest in an English-language

daily. The group has other plans up its sleeve—it has already begun some initial legwork to launch a FM radio.

"A free press has not materialised in Nepal yet. But is not subjugated, and if foreign investment is allowed that might be the end of our sense of nationality," says Suresh Acharya, president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists. The same issue, permitting foreign investment in the media, faced strong opposition in India. Sushma Swaraj, India's Minister for Information and Broadcasting, had drawn widespread flak last October when she publicly said that foreign investment in media

POEMS IN NEPAL'S NATIONAL LANGUAGES

before our identity is erased?

The third poem takes a lighter tone, and shows, with humour, the conditions of rural life. It is originally written in the Maithili language, and called *Bhagawanak Lalten*.

GOD'S LANTERN

Dr Dhirendra

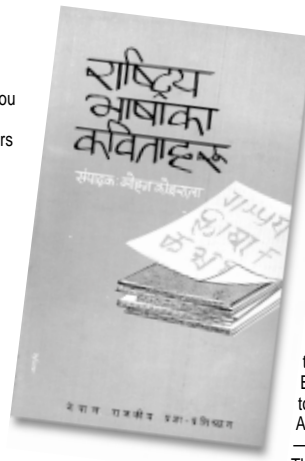
In her childish lisp my daughter Annaa explains—

"That's not the moon, it's god's lantern Don't you see, Manju didi? Like our father, for fifteen days they light it quite brightly without a care in the world And then when the kerosene runs out they have to make do with the oil lamps of the stars."

The final poem, below, is also on the lighter side, and it shows the clash of cultures taking place in rural Nepal. In its original Bhojpuri language, it is called *Pop Leela*.

A POP DRAMA

Bhagyanath Gupta



Endowed with a supple walk and suggestive dress, an enchanting appearance, gigantic tresses decked with ribbons, large eyes, rosy cheeks, a teeka on the forehead, a flat breastless body, a gentle perfume caused by scents, a chain around the neck, polish on the nails, a natural crimson hue to the lips, bangles decorating both wrists, earrings on the ears—anyone would be spellbound to behold such a beautiful form. But a father's heart splits apart to see his son looking like this. A father gets bewildered thinking—oh lord, what kind of age is upon us? The father is halved by the thought that a son like this will drown the whole lineage. So the father said to the son—Babu! We must get you married now, I'd be at peace if we could set up your family within my own lifetime. The son replied—No need for elaborate preparations, No need for barbers, priests or feasts. I'll have a court marriage. And so the advertisement for a bride was printed in all the newspapers. Many response letters were received. When he opened the letters the pop son was shocked! Seeing the picture of the pop boy everyone took him to be a girl and wrote back making sundry demands for dowry. Now the son lost his mind. He said to the father—That's enough, Ba. Let's call a barber at once and cut off all my hair, Let's also call a brahman. I'll get married in the traditional way. ♦

And so search for your missing self recall your forgotten history and

And Aasyaang— Your son Theba birthed by your young lass: what should his future be like? Think—think about this for yourself

The second poem, originally called *Indel Kamabi Ho Ei*, is written in the Khaling/Rai language. It speaks of the depopulation of the villages, and the struggle for identity, themes largely missing from Nepal's literature.

WILL YOU COME BACK TO THE VILLAGE?

Shiva Kumar Khaling

You... saying you'll come by this evening you'll come by tomorrow you'll definitely come by this winter or by any means you'll arrive by the end of the year you keep me waiting and waiting I'm left to stare at the path Where have you gotten ensnared? Here...if there were a sun it's on the verge of setting if there were a fire it's close to dying out if there were a river it's drying up, if there were a flower it's begun to wilt Here...there is great difficulty in keeping our culture alive There are no Shilee dancers for the Tosi puja There are no Risiwa singers There is no one to recite veda and mundhum texts And so...will you come back to the village before the Khaling language of Khaling is lost before the mundhum vedas of Khaling are forgotten before our culture becomes extinct

Happiness is a warm Botega, Mamacita

At a table near mine 10 young Nepalis celebrate a birthday, dunce caps and laughter are a part of the menu, opposite a bureaucrat removes his topi as the tequila rises and he leans to chat to a friend over the salsa (the music not the sauce) and behind me two gringos stare at the passing scene outside Botega, the Mexican restaurant in Thamel.

So what happened to the low season?

Walter did.

The first time I didn't meet Walter was at The Stupa View in Baudha's inner circle. I wanted to thank the owner for a creation of potatoes and cheese that melted in one's mouth. He was out. The second, third and so on times I didn't meet Walter was because the restaurant was closed for summer vacations.

I would take friends to meet a Rinpoche at a monastery near The Stupa View. Several visits later, so delicious was the food, so soothing the influence of the Stupa that the Rinpoche would come and chat. Still no Walter.

Great food, impeccable service. No Walter.

Then a serape clad, sombrero-ed kid who might be Kunda Dixit moonlighting, hands a group of us handbills and a flight of stairs and bright lights later we were in Botega. A brisk but friendly Shrestha took our orders, I remember venturing through a Fajita, corn chappatis and a spicy chicken mix with just the right amount of sour cream. I remembered it well as Harmonie Gingold and Maurice Chevalier sang in *Gigi*, and came back for the mutton cooked with chillies and red wine, and yet again for the spiced baked fish then again for the bread of chicken "coked" (sic) in a sauce from the state of Michoacan. Who cares where Michoacan is as long it exports its dishes.

I busily worked my way through the Mexican food and then I turned the page.

And met Walter.

Literally, and on two counts.

It was a thinly disguised Austrian menu. And a slim, slight, slightly Prussian, gentleman materialised recommended the Wiener Schnitzel and introduced himself as Walter.

Where had he been all my life?

"At The Stupa View and at The Chinese Border."

A Sino—Tibetan menu?

"I have a resort there," said Walter.

Curiouser and curiouser.

How long had he been in Nepal?

"I forget," he said.

Why Nepal, I asked, digging into the tenderest Schnitzel. "When I find out maybe I'll know," said Walter. Shades of Descartes.

By now I've got to know the staff, the Nepali Dhal Bhat and Momo menu, and the sinful dessert selection think fat and try the fried bananas, with chocolate sauce, and roasted walnuts. Som Gurung's recommendation: a rice pudding with orange, cinnamon whipped cream and Kahlua. You get sated and drunk at the same moment and the staff carry you out in triumphant procession.

Som Gurung enjoys working at Botega as much as its many customers revel in the food, he busses tables and introduces guests to one another. Convivial.

Krishna Shrestha who manages the place with a distinctly iron hand, velvet glove touch in Walter's frequent absences, said, "I've been here since the beginning, nine months ago. The boss has invited Nepali trekking friends and now they just come. Mexican and Nepali food are all all similar."

An evening at Botega ("It's Walter's Botega," corrects Chef Hari Prasad Dhital) is a joy forever at least until the next day.

As Walter would say "Ve half vays of making you happy." If he were actually in one place long enough to say so. ♦



Walter tends bar.

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EATING OUT

❖ **Peking Duck** And other Chinese delicacies by Chef Tiyoung Fan from China. Tien Shan Chinese Restaurant, Hotel Shangri La. 412999

❖ **Breakfast with birds** Lunch with butterflies, dinner with fireflies. Traditional Nepali, Indian, and Chinese cuisine. Farm House Café in the Park Village Hotel, Buddhanilkantha. 373935

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❖ **Naachghar** New menu featuring wide variety of kababs and biryani daily. 7pm—10.30pm. Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999

❖ **Nepali Dance and Culinary Flavours** Over 40 traditional delicacies as well as favourites from India. Flavour of the month, Newari cuisine. Starting August, Himalchuli at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 273999

❖ **Friday Night Sekuwa (BBQ)** Appetisers, momos, salads, main courses and desserts, one complimentary beer. Rs 699 per head. Throughout the monsoon at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

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

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MUSIC

❖ **Jammin' Hell!** DJ Jimmy Tangri brings the hottest hits and most diabolic sounds. Every Saturday starting 4 August 2pm. The Arch Room, Hotel De L' Annapurna. Rs 500 per couple includes a welcome drink. Tickets available at Hotel De L' Annapurna, The Club-Bhatbhateni, Nanglo, Bakery Café outlets, Kathmandu Guest House.

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❖ **DJ Neil/Live Bands** On weekends. Happy hours everyday. Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 6pm—9pm. 491234

❖ **Cadenza** The best jazz band in town plays every Saturday night at Upstairs, Lazimpat. 7.30pm—10pm. Rs 200.

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GETAWAYS

❖ **Dwarika's Anytime Escape** Overnight accommodation with afternoon tea, cocktail, dinner, breakfast and massage. \$130 net per couple. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

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❖ **August Affair in Pokhara** Two-night weekend package includes meals, live music, extra bed for children under 12 years, meals, airport transfers, mango festival. Hotel Shangri La, Pokhara. 412999

❖ **Nagarkot Escape.** Weekends in cottages, views of the Himalayas, valley and forests. Special rates for Nepalis and resident expats. Hotel Keyman Chautari. keyman@wlink.com.np. 436850

CULTURE

❖ **Rakshya Bandhan** On this day Hindu sisters tie holy bands around their brother's wrists and pray for their safety and make food offerings. Brothers vow to always love and protect their sisters and present them with gifts. Saturday 4 August

❖ **Gai Jatra** The festival of cows. Males of families whose members have died during the past year dress up as cows and parade around the city. Sunday 5 August.

❖ **Mataya** Hundreds of Buddhist devotees gather at Krishna Mandir at Patan Durbar Square to observe the annual Mataya festival and complete a traditional route through 2500 courtyards and Buddhist shrines of Patan. The procession this year starts Naghbahal. 6 August, Monday. For more information contact Dilendra Shrestha, Third World Restaurant. 522187

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

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BOOKWORM



Imperial Gorkha: An Account of Gorkhali Rule in Kumaun (1791-1815)
Mahesh C Regmi
Adroit Publishers, Delhi, 1999
Rs 480

This study analyses the policies and programs followed by the Gorkhali rulers to control and administer the province of Kumaun, which they controlled from 1791-1815. Regmi examines the instruments of imperial control, their implementation and effects on the life of ordinary people.

Ideas in Action: Digital Achievement of Idea Marathon System (IMS)
Takeo Higuchi
Adarsh Books, New Delhi, 2001
Rs 400

Japanese manager Takeo Higuchi teaches you to strengthen and accelerate your ability to form ideas, locate new value in your work and life, and find hidden abilities previously unknown to you. With the IMS system, he says, you can have as many as 15 ideas everyday, and make your life and work more creative.



Tibet: The Great Game and Tsarist Russia Tatiana Shaumian
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000
Rs 872

Shaumian describes the features of Tibet's relations with Russia, China, Great Britain and Mongolia in the late-19th and early-20th centuries and Tibet's attempts to consolidate its independence. The establishment of Russo-Tibetan relations was a part of the Great Game, Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia, ending with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.

Hidden Wealth: The Survival Strategy of Foraging Farmers in the Upper Arun Valley, Eastern Nepal Ephrosine Daniggelis
Mandala Book Point/ The Mountain Institute, Kathmandu, 1997
Rs 800

Daniggelis spent 20 months with the Rau and Sherpa communities of the upper Apsuwa Valley, learning about their sustainable uses of jungle, a mosaic of natural forests and agricultural fields. The non-farm jungle is the ultimate polycrop system and throws light on ethnobotany, trade, nutrition and religion.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

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YAK YETI YAK



by MIKU

NEPALI WEATHER



Finally, Nepal's hills and plains got their much-awaited rainstorms last week, starting 30 July. Farmers waiting to cultivate their paddy were happy with the year's highest rainfall so far, but the lashings of rain also triggered heavy landslides and floods in the midwestern hills, killing at least 30 people and destroying dozens of homes. In 24 hours, Nepalganj received 164 mm rainfall, whereas Bhairahawa and Simra, 102 mm each, and Biratnagar, 73 mm. Satellite images indicate the rains will continue to come down this week, but with less intensity. The strong trough over Pakistan is drawing clouds from the Bay of Bengal along the low-pressure belt over the Gangetic plain and Nepal. In western Nepal, you'll need to keep your stormy weather gear on. But Valley residents won't be so lucky—average daytime average temperatures, which dropped by 3° C last week, will rise again this week, 2°.

KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
				
29-20	29-20	28-19	29-20	28-19

CITY



This Gai Jatra is a good time to recognise that cows in the city are more than just a bad joke.

SALIL SUBEDI

The cells in the Kathmandu Municipality Security Offices in Teku have non-human inmates. An average of five cows are apprehended every week a week by the municipal moo-squad, and detained in this concrete House. Eight are currently in custody. Bishow Raj Joshi, a municipal sub-inspector wonders at the figures. "How many people still own cows in this concrete jungle?" he asks. Joshi waxes rather sentimental for someone who spends his days locking up bovine trespassers. "Poor cows," he sighs, "they have only plastic and trash to feed on."

Unlike their human counterparts, imprisoned cows are auctioned, not released on bail or awaiting trial, and fetch around anywhere between Rs 100 and Rs 2,000. The stray cowherds one still encounters on the riverbanks and empty plots are offended that their cows are so ill-used. "What is the harm in keeping cows. It is the government that is bad. See, the city is so polluted, everything is adulterated. Keeping cows means that at least you can drink pure milk," argues Tulsi Bhetwal from Manamajju, whose cows graze in the empty fields of Gongabu.

Unlike their rural cousins, city cows enjoy a good deal of freedom, and can make friends in all neighbourhoods. But their social life only ever lasts for short periods—their owners are happy to let them graze their way across town, but only to ensure they are well-fed. Then, they find them and

HAPPENINGS



by MIKU

OPENING STATEMENT: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba speaks at his first public function a forum on the Maoist problem. Tuesday, 31 July.



by MIKU

COME RAIN OR SHINE: Protesting the Public Security Act in unpredictable weather outside Singha Darbar, Monday, 30 July.



by MIKU

SHOPPING FOR BUDDHAS: Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca takes time out from her visit to Nepal for a trip to Thamel for curries with US Ambassador Ralph Frank on Friday, 27 July.

19

3-9 AUGUST 2001 NEPALI TIMES

Holy cow



to be comatose to miss the irony of the last two in a city that has such a huge waste management problem. Perhaps it is time to pray for the health and cleanliness of the city to Kamadhenu, the cow that fulfils all your desires. This *Gai Jatra*, 5 August, Valley residents can do just that, as they watch an endless stream of cows—and humans dressed as cows—parading across town to ease the journeys of our recently departed across the river to heaven.

Or, we can all take this opportunity to take on our holiest cows and make violent fun of them—on Gai Jatra, it is allowed. ♦



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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

It's not cricket

Asia is divided into two types of countries: those that play cricket and those that eat them. The Line of Control between these two eco-biological domains passes along 118 deg. East meridian in the vicinity of the Andaman Sea. There is also a third type of country in Asia, which is the one that likes to play with crickets by tying pieces of string on their hind legs, organising cricket races, and betting on them. But in general, it would be safe to say that west of the Abdomen Sea, cricket is a sport, and to the east, it

Jayawardene finishes his warm-up and gets ready to begin his 22nd over. The silence from the stands is deafening, and it looks like the 45,000 people gathered here today have all fallen asleep. Over to you, John. Wake up, John."

Scintillating stuff. Football fans don't really need a very high IQ, and soccer scores are fairly simple: Manchester United-Liverpool: 1-1. to read cricket scores on the other hand, you need to have a double-PhD in Medical Anthropology and



is a meal. Many people think cricket is the most boring sport on earth. They're wrong. It is the most boring sport in the known universe.

It takes time for a cricket match to really get going. Usually the warm-up period lasts several days while each side tries to size up the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy team. The live commentary during this phase of the game goes something like this (delivered in sonorous tones and at slo-mo pace):

"Welcome back, the tea break is over, and there is 15 minutes to go now for the snack break. Here comes Jayawardene walking slowly into the bowler's side of the wicket, hands his hat to the umpire, who takes it, and, wait a minute, Jayawardene has something in his hand. We don't know what it is, but it is just as I had suspected, yes, it is indeed a ball. Jayawardene has got a red ball in his hand, and from the look on his face, he means business. And what is he doing with it, now? Incredible, Jayawardene has taken the red ball, and is rubbing it vigorously in the front of his trousers. There he goes, ladies and gentlemen, what an incredibly smooth and confident movement the Sri Lankan captain is exhibiting during this Tri-nation One-day Series. He is indeed in fine form. Wha..? I don't believe this, did you see that? Jayawardene just cleared his throat and spat out a big glob of snot on the ball... he is now spreading the ointment evenly all over the ball so as to give the projectile a drag-free aerodynamic trajectory. It is obvious the Kiwis are getting nervous, and there is pin-drop silence all over the stadium as

Statistics. Here is one scoreboard:

Sinclair lbw Vyas.....1
Astle c Jayawardene b Gunawardene.....4
Fleming c&b Dharmasena.....0
Jayawardene st Dighe b Badani.....34
Bookmaker MK Gupta.....\$4,500,000
Extras: (lb-10,nb-5)
TOTAL (in 46.5 overs).....183

Bowling: Vaas 7-1-20-3 (nb-1), Fernando 7-2-19-2 (w-9), Muralitharan 8-1-21-0, Perera 4-0-24-0 (w-4), Dharmasena 7-1-16-2.

Weather: Bright sunny spells with chances of a shower and persistent rain on the final day forcing the last game to abandoned as a draw. Which is just as well because without the rain the Kiwis would have lost.

We in Nepal have to thank our lucky stars our country was never colonised by leg spinners, and therefore did not inherit a sport with score-keeping like that. In fact it is matter of national pride that we do not play cricket, and we must doubly redouble our efforts to uphold this glorious tradition so that we can continue to claim that we were never under an imperialist yoke.

From Nalapani to Kalapani, we will resist all attempts to catch us out in deep square leg with two wickets and nine balls to spare in the final round-robin match. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Salaam, Sonam

Human rights got a good name when Sonam Tshengjung Lama was awarded this year's Prakash Human Rights award. Sonam is from faraway Kamdi Khari village in Mugu district, in Nepal's wild west.

Everything seemed perfect for the award ceremony until the monsoon played spoilsport. Sonam could not travel to Kathmandu to collect her prize because the helicopter from Surkhet was delayed in reaching Mugu, and then landslides on the Prithvi Highway prevented her from getting to the ceremony.

Sonam got the award for doing good in simple ways for the benefit of those around her in her village. Well-off by Mugu standards—both her family and in-laws have 10-15 yaks—Sonam is a good householder. She has farmed with her husband, taken the yaks to graze and even ferried goods for their little shop from as far away as Lhasa and New Delhi. In between she also found time for what she liked best: to help those who needed it the most, because she says, "I cannot stand the suffering of others."

By tradition, the elderly

in Kamdi Khari were supposed to live separately, barred from participating in community activities. In a place where you're stuck indoors for up to four months due to the snow outside, this lack of mobility can be truly excruciating. Sonam campaigned to change all that and succeeded in bringing the elders back into the fold. Her next stop was the village council. There she championed the cause of the poor and those looked down upon by society. She forced the village elders to set aside foodgrain sent by the government for widows and the elderly, arguing that the handouts were meant for those on the brink and not those who had enough yaks in the household.

Slowly, Sonam dismantled the shackles of tradition in her village and surroundings. She helped raise farming wages, mobilised villagers to ferry pipes from Surkhet to build a drinking water system.

"From an early age I used to be saddened every time I saw someone inflicting suffering on others," she says. The Prakash Human Rights Award is named after the Nepali activist Prakash Kafle who died in a plane crash in 1993, and is given by the group, INSEC.

Sonam told us: "I did not get to study, and I have to look after my elderly parents. At night I card wool and I get blisters on my hands. I've travelled to Tibet to ferry goods. Sometimes apples, sometimes potatoes, sometimes timber. From there I bring back salt, rice, tea, shoes, yak tails..."

And still to have time to help others. ♦

