



Someone I can talk to... 8-9



**EXCLUSIVE**

**Children in crossfire**

Maotist attacks are expected to intensify in the run-up to a threatened strike 2-6 April. Western embassies have asked tourists to exercise caution, but stopped short of saying they should cancel travel plans. The ban will directly affect 250,000 students who start their SLC



exams next week. Maoists appear to have deliberately timed the strike to coincide with the exams. The government promises full security at consolidated exam centres nationwide.

**Editor freed**

Muljankar editor Shyam Shrestha's nine-day ordeal in custody ended Tuesday. He and two fellow detainees were blindfolded, handcuffed and interrogated on their alleged links with Indian Maoists to news reports about civilian deaths in the counter-insurgency campaign. "At times we were mistreated and threatened," Shrestha told us. The editor of Sanghu, Gopal Budathoki, was also freed after 24 days in detention. At least 30 journalists are still in custody. The Paris-based group, Reporters without Borders, said "The fight against terrorism, however lawful, cannot justify serious human rights violations, especially those involving press freedom."

**COAS appeal to media**

Chief of Army Staff General Prajwala S Rana this week asked journalists report facts, saying one confusing or false news is all that it takes to affect public trust, and morale in the army ranks. (For translation of speech, see p3)

**BINOD BHATTARAI**

A football game is in progress. Players are fouling and not playing fair. At halftime, the referee changes the rules to allow offside.

That is how some political analysts characterise the present debate over constitutional reforms. The country's crisis represents a failure of politicians, they say, not the constitution.

But those in favour of reforms, and this group now includes the entire spectrum of parliamentary parties, want to tinker with the constitution—all for their own partisan interests.

The agenda for this debate is being set from behind the scenes by the Maoists and their violent attempt to dismantle parliamentary democracy. The Nepali Congress, UML, RPP and NSP all agree (and hope) that constitutional reforms will set everything right, and it may even bring the Maoists to the mainstream.

The Nepali Congress appears desperate enough to believe in its own parables. But it may not be as easy as that, and constitutional changes at this time may actually have unforeseen consequences. The debate over constitutional reforms is expected to heat up in the coming weeks, and may be little more than a way for non-performing parliamentary parties to divert attention from their own shortcomings.

At present all parliamentary parties and the palace are arrayed against the Maoists. The debate over constitutional change is sure to pit everyone against each other, and shatter this unity. But the pro-change juggernaut is now set to roll. Those like constitutional law expert Ganesh Raj Sharma who oppose tinkering, are becoming voices in the wilderness. "I still say, show some patience and discipline in the conduct of democracy, and things will fall into place," he told us.

Then there are those, including the

**Rewriting rules**

Politicians want change. Any change.

Maoists, who say things have now got so bad that mere constitutional reform will not suffice. Former speaker and architect of the present constitution, Daman Nath Dhungana, is from this school. He says: "Every political party has its own agenda, how are they ever going to agree? I believe the answer may lie in a Constituent Assembly, there doesn't seem to be any other alternative to end the bloodshed."

The proposals for constitutional change of various political parties read like election manifestos. Many of the ideas do not need a change in the statutes to be implemented, new legislation would do. Here is a brief summary of the proposals the big parties have put up. The ruling Nepali Congress wants:

- Grant citizenship to all voters in the 1980 referendum
- Delineate more clearly the powers of the king
- Limit cabinet size to 25
- Slash lower house size to 155, and upper house to 35
- Public hearings to confirm appointment of Chief Justice
- Parliamentary hearings for confirming ambassadorships
- Prime minister to form 15-member election government
- The main opposition, UML, for its part, would like to have:
  - An election government of all parties in parliament
  - A national government in periods of crisis
  - No more legal ambiguity over dissolution of parliament
  - Limit cabinet size to 10 percent of parliament membership
  - Give the CIAA more fangs
  - Public hearings for appointments to all constitutional bodies
  - More power to local government units
  - Special programs for dalits, janajatis and women
  - Education to respond to national need
  - Confiscate property of corrupt
  - Solve citizenship crisis without compromising national interest

The RPP and the NSP have their own lists which we will not go into here, except

to say that the RPP wants members of the proposed election government not to contest elections, and local body elections to be on non-party basis. The taraibased NSP's main plank is regional autonomy and a resolution of the citizenship problem. Oh yes, the NSP also want Hindi to be the national second language.

The only thing everyone seems to agree on is that the prime minister should have the power to seek a fresh mandate, and the formation of some kind of neutral election government. But agreeing and incorporating all the proposals, and keeping everyone happy would be long and acrimonious.

However pious the intentions for constitutional reforms are made to sound, almost every word in the party proposals smack of some vested, short-term partisan interest. The NC's proposals are devised in a manner that would increase its chances of remaining in power, and the UML's to provide it a stepping stone to enter Singha Darbar. ♦

**Times nepalnews.com**

Q. Is it a good idea for Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to visit India?

Total votes: 1049

Viewed 231232. To view this poll go to: [nepalnews.com](http://nepalnews.com)

Q. Should the government accept the Maoist offer to resume talks?

**Maoist olive branch?**

**SARBARI MAJUMDAR IN CALCUTTA**

Even if he was planning to meet Maoists, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba couldn't have possibly fit them in during his hectic schedule in Calcutta 23-24 March. A visit to Howrah, banquet by West Bengal Governor Jitendra Nath Chatterjee, puja to the goddess Kali, tours of two museums, and the next morning a half-hour talk with chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya (see picture, right).

However, Indian intelligence sources tell us three top Maoist leaders had entered West Bengal during the week of the Deuba visit and were staying at a safe house in Siliguri. Chandra Prasad Gajmer, the central committee member in charge of international relations, Mohan Baidya, the 60-something central committee member, and Top Bahadur Raimajhi, Maoist negotiator in the first round of talks, were there to see if they could meet Deuba and resume dialogue, sources said.

"It was the Maoists who were desperate to reopen talks with the government," one senior Nepali official accompanying the prime minister said. "The initiative came from them, not from Deuba."

He said Deuba was keen to get a consensus from other political leaders in Kathmandu before resuming talks. Initial Maoist feelers seem to have gone out while Deuba was in New Delhi, but the prime minister could not at such short notice change

his disarm-before-negotiation stance.

A former Indian intelligence official and top expert on Maoists, Amijo Kumar Samanta, told us this was standard Maoist tactics: "Under military pressure, they would look for fresh talks and send out feelers, and when the government turns them down they spread the rumour they are not keen to meet them."

Indian military analysts like Maj-Gen K K Ganguly feel Deuba may be waiting to see what kind of military help he can get from India, the United States and Britain so he can carry a bigger stick before talks resume. "If he gets something substantial without strings attached, he will keep pursuing the military option," Ganguly told us.

In the end, Deuba did sightseeing and seems to have hit it off well with Bhattacharya. Sources present at the meeting said both agreed about the common threat to Nepal and India from Maoists and the need for a concerted offensive. Bhattacharya later told the press the alliance between Nepali Maoists and the Peoples War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre was a major threat for India. He alleged that Pakistani military intelligence was backing the groups to destabilise India's strategic Siliguri Corridor. "It is in our mutual interests to fight the Maoists," Bhattacharya said.



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DEBRIEFING DEUBA

A prime ministerial trip to Sher Bahadur Deuba's travel to New Delhi and Calcutta last week can be classed as a low-intensity visit.

Cutting through the diplomatic verbiage, the rhetorical speeches, and the predictable answers to predictable questions at press conferences, we get a glimmer of the reason why the Indians perhaps ignored the visit.

a) Nepal has a serious Maoist problem; b) its leaders have safe haven in Indian territory; c) the growth of a Maoist revolt in India has serious cross-border implications for the Indian states in an arc of instability from West Bengal to Andhra Pradesh.

Let this sudden spurt of Indian interest in our own dry little war eyes back home, Deuba told just about everyone who cared to listen that there was absolutely no need for the Indian Army to come to our aid.

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The visit also demystified certain mysteries. If it wasn't glaringly evident before, it is quite open now that the Indians have a fairly good idea of the whereabouts of our comrades in Noida and Gonda.

Meanwhile, back on the home front, Deuba returns to renewed efforts by party dissidents to unseat him.

Despite being personally doubtful of Maoist trustworthiness after being let down in November, there are now indications that the Maoists themselves are hot about talking again.

The last time the Maoists came to talk last year, they used the three months to launch a campaign of extortion and intimidation in the countryside, they rearm, regrouped and retained to prepare to take on the army.

One thing everyone—the Maoists, the ruling party, the opposition, the security forces—must respond to is growing public weariness with this senseless and wasteful war.

The comrades, for their part, are using the fireworks in the run-up to and during their five-day banth as a bargaining chip to force Deuba on talks.

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“Who brought the nation to its present condition?”



Translated excerpts of the hard-hitting speech delivered by Chief of Army Staff, Prajvala SJB Rana, at the convocation of the command and staff training at the Tokha on Wednesday.

Was the state of emergency declared because the army wanted it, or was it needed because of this grave threat to national security? Before debating this issue, we need to understand why the state of emergency was needed in the first place.

In a country where there is a democracy, elected people's representatives and an elected majority government, we can accept the killing of one Nepal by another, do you think the army has stepped out to kill our own brothers and sisters on its own accord? It is right to blame the Royal Nepalese Army, the protector of national security, for a situation which is the result of 12 years of political factors.

The Royal Nepalese Army has been carrying out the orders of His Majesty's Government, and implementing its assigned tasks. But are the elected people's representatives also taking up their responsibilities in their constituencies? In accordance with the constitution, the Royal Nepalese Army has been deployed to achieve the national goal of eliminating terrorism.

There may be other reasons that the country has arrived at this critical juncture, but in the present context it is clear that the main factor is Maoist terrorism. In accordance with the constitution, the Royal Nepalese Army has been deployed to achieve the national goal of eliminating terrorism.

At a time when all citizens need to unite to defeat the Maoists, we see confusion, political drift and power struggles for the leadership of parties. Why are these selfish games of factional dominance being played out with

headquarters and has been on the defensive. In a situation where, after the declaration of emergency, the army has been deployed nationwide, such blinkered views are totally untrue.

It may not be possible for the Royal Nepalese Army to remain permanently in all areas it has reached, but the clashes that have taken place in different parts of the country prove that the allegations are baseless.

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thinking. By ranting against Nepal's alleged soft state, Lal unwittingly advocates an authoritarian state. And, what is most galling, he still pontificates that change has to begin from the bottom.

Since we have authoritarian states, those monstrosities of top-down models started to encourage bottom-up democratic processes? There has to be another way out of our current political stalemate, Mr

One important aspect of constitutional reform that got left out during editing my piece ("Why do we need constitutional reforms?," #84) is the reference to 'gender-empowerment through electoral equality'. This is vital for the socialisation of democracy because much of development and democracy are really meaningful to women at the grassroots where they reside.

I suggested a system of electoral segregation where at the VDC level women chose two women and if they have the majority in the population one more to comprise village panchayats. At the district level each political party fields a male and female candidate, as a team for DDC/Municipality leadership. For real devolution, all taxes must be collected as per the national parliamentary decrees by the VDC Tax Office and earmark

are equally sensitive that innocent people should suffer any losses in the course of war, and we have given clear orders of this to all concerned. Still, there may have been some lapses on our side. We have learnt and have continuously improved our work style...

I now want to use this opportunity to address the respected journalistic fraternity. The nation is going through a very difficult situation, the country is in a critical state. Because of the security situation there have been fewer tourists, and businesses relying on tourism are collapsing. Nepalis and foreigners working on development and infrastructure are stopping construction work.

STATE OF THE STATE



More of the same in Monterrey

The US offers more dough to poor countries to join its global war on terror. But will it help?

Dr Ram Sharan Maharaj owes an explanation to the nation about what exactly he achieved by flying halfway across the globe to Monterrey's UN Financing for Development on the occasion of a national crisis and a cabinet memorandum on foreign trade.

To be fair, the aid did partially pay for the literary drive and the malaria eradication campaigns. Other donors such as India, Russia and Britain have done the same together to fight their fear of Chinese influence in the Himalayan Kingdom with investment in infrastructure projects, but the unintended consequence of this largely unscrupulous largesse was the institutionalisation of a culture of dependency.

The stated purpose of the Monterrey meet last week was to discuss to double the \$50 billion for foreign aid every two years to halve poverty by 2015. The United States, which was giving only 0.01 percent of its GDP as aid compared with the UN recommended

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percent), announced a doubling of aid to 200%—partly to offset criticism in Monterrey. But post 9/11, aid is suddenly being presented as an antidote to terrorism.

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on earlier loan deals. Nothing short of writing off all past loans can check the further perpetuation of the world's poor. Administering the IMF prescriptions over last two decades has aggravated the ills of poverty, marginalisation and exclusion in the developing world.

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COWS OR DONKEYS?

Your editorial ('Fixing the roof while the house is on fire,' #83) contributes to the debate on constitutional reform. The idea should be to elect peoples' representatives who are responsible and accountable to the people.

One important aspect of constitutional reform that got left out during editing my piece ("Why do we need constitutional reforms?," #84) is the reference to 'gender-empowerment through electoral equality'. This is vital for the socialisation of democracy because much of development and democracy are really meaningful to women at the grassroots where they reside.

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LETTERS

La, for the medicine you propose is as bad as the disease, if not worse.

Heera Shrestha Sydney

ARMS AS US US Ambassador Mike Malinowski after his visit to western Nepal ('Angry Americans,' #83) drew parallels between the Maoists and the Shining Path, Khmer Rouge and al-Qaeda. This may be indication that the US is ready to support Nepal's war on Maoists' terrorists."

It is so good news for Nepal that the Bush administration has increased by 27 percent the funding for a federal program designed to bolster the militaries in several counties including Nepal. But will such help be sufficient to enable the government to eliminate the Maoist threat? We need commando training, helicopters, reconnaissance equipment, armoured vehicles and maintenance personnel in large numbers, comparable

Doesn't Kunda Dixit have a saying in the ads that appear next to his column? If so, can he call off the one that extols the imagined virtues of fair skin? That ad is offensive in a journal of your quality.

Joyce Silverstein Pokhara

to what was supplied to Colombia and the Philippines. Only then will the Maoists no longer present the threat to the people of Nepal.

Chandrakala Thapa by email

TEARS OF LAUGHTER Kunda Dixit's column with the Shakespeare quotes ("Much ado about nothing new," #85) moved me from laughter and then to tears when I got to the part "I think our country sinks beneath the yoke it weeps, it bleeds and each new day a gash is added to her wounds."

Hilary Dittam by email

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They know a donkey when they see one.

Hari Pokharel Taiwan

GENDER AGENDA Scrimption over the Monterrey meet is grounded in the reality of failed expectations. Despite the dazzlingly intelligent and glib arguments of development economists, global poverty hasn't decreased, and the inequality between the poor and the rich has in fact increased.

Madhukar Rana Patan

ALL CORRUPT I read your editorial ('41-2=39,' #85) which analyses the Judicial Commission to control corruption set up by King Gyanendra. My question is: what are we going to do if everyone is corrupt? After the Supreme Court comes with its final report after six months, there will be no one who is clean. Will they all be prosecuted? If yes, then who is going to let it lead to the country's development?

Pravesh Sarita Chicago, Illinois

SOFT STATE CK Lal's column ('In a soft state,' #85) is nugatory, jejune and fraught with muddled

headquarters and has been on the defensive. In a situation where, after the declaration of emergency, the army has been deployed nationwide, such blinkered views are totally untrue.

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# Free to be miserable



NEARLY PLANNED Srilanka REHABILITATION CENTRE IN KAILASH.

**HEMLATA RAI IN KAILASH** Things are looking up in Srilanka, West Ceylon. But Srilanka in Nepal's Kailash District, the former kamaiya rehabilitation camp. It looks like a new planned township, houses with tin roofs in neat rows on either side of dusty alleys. Other houses are going up in empty plots, sweaty workers are making dhikarias traditional mud containers to store food grains.

Chet Ram Chaudhary of Srilanka camp already had plenty to fill up his dhikarias. He was able to harvest more than five quintals of paddy last season in his land, and hopes that with complementing income from odd labour jobs, the grain will sustain his small family of three for the coming year. "I have enough to feed my family for present therefore, I afford to give my time for social works," he said

with the pride that he is a member of the school and sanitation and bonded labourers have no place to go, they just moved down the road to another plot at the edge of the jungle. Raghu Chaudhary and 133 other families live in constant fear of their kamaiya status.

On 17 July 2000, the government outlawed the kamaiya system, a perpetual bonded labour system, practiced mostly in five far-western tarai districts of Banke, Bardia, Kailash, Kanchanpur and Dang. The government announcement immediately ended all the debt and bonded obligations of kamaiyas who left their employers (kisans).

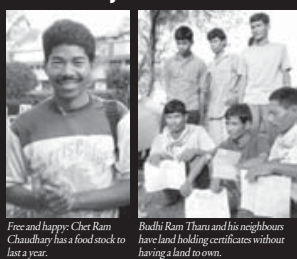
Presently, former kamaiyas are living in 65 camps. Last year, the government distributed identity cards to former kamaiyas—red cards for kamaiyas without any landholding and blue for those

owning some land. The government distributes rehabilitation coupons, including distribution of housing plots, on the basis of these identity cards. Official records show that more than 18,000 households have identity cards, of which 80 percent have already been distributed land for settlement.

However, the non-governmental organisations involved in rehabilitation are not happy with the identification card system. The Backward Society Education (BASE), an NGO spearheading kamaiya rights says 2,600 households in the ex-kamaiyas are left out of the identification process. BASE director Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary told us that lack of government coordination is the reason for the problem.

The process requires kisans to endorse kamaiyas before they can qualify for the identity cards. Many kisan refused to identify their

## Nearly a year after being unbonded, kamaiyas find freedom is just another word.



Free and happy: Chet Ram Chaudhary has a food stock to last a year. Budhi Ram Phara and his neighbours have land holding certificates without having a land to own.

former kamaiyas fearing compensation payments for bondage.

"It's just a stunt," says Sirdari Devi Chaudhary of Manohara in Kailash. "We are in the hands of a hypocrite government that lacks sincerity."

Under secretary at the Ministry of Land Reform and Management Shankar Prasad Dhungana is aware that many ex-kamaiyas missed out in the list, and assures them his office will make amends. "We need a cabinet decision to make it happen, but it is responsibility of the ex-kamaiyas to make their voice heard at the policymaking level," he said at a kamaiya conference in Nepalgunj this weekend.

The main problem is that government departments don't coordinate their activities. In Kailash, for example, the Land Reform Office identified the areas for kamaiya settlement, but the District Forest

Office refused to allow it.

In Banke some kamaiya families were distributed land ownership certificates without having a land to own. We met Budhi Ram Tharu and 27 other households who were distributed land ownership certificates four months back that shows each family holds 3 kharas of land in Manau village. The Banke District Forest Office refused them the promised plots in Manau.

Now the Land Distribution Commission has promised them 3 kharas of land in Madhugadh village since they are staying in plastic tents since last two weeks.

Ramesh Chaudhary, leader of recently formed Liberated Kamaiyas Upliftment Committee, draws only one conclusion: "The government just wants to weaken our collective movement. But we are determined to fight for our right. We'll keep struggling." ♦

by DANIEL LAK



# The Talibs of Appenzell

## No nation has a monopoly on barbarism and blood-letting.

veer of civility and modernity is paper-thin everywhere, that even the most advanced industrial societies can fall into bloody mayhem at a moments notice. And that all of our pasts are awash in backwardness, nasty behaviour, discrimination against women, the weak and the poor. "We're American diplomats told me that Afghanistan was off the screen, zero interest level." People like my KIC friend and a few other brave souls were doing their best, but officials in Washington, London and most of Europe wasn't interested.

I asked this fellow late one night, after far too many tins of Bulgarian beer, why he stayed, why he was so capable of dealing with all types of Afghans, from widows to warlords. His answer was a classic, and full of relevance for modern day Nepal where the risk of turning into 1990s Afghanistan can't be ignored.

"I am Swiss," said my friend, "I come from Appenzell—land—the most backward part of my country. We still haven't allowed women the right to vote in local elections. And sixty years ago, we were killing each other over cattle and women. We were having blood feuds, blockading each other and killing families in revenge. We were like the Taliban or any other Afghan warrior."

He went on to explain a peer theory, that the

only logic was a country in the late 1800s, dozens of princely states and duchies united under a doddering monarchy that only began to prosper after tinkering with fascism and suffering grievous defeats in two major wars. Germany too came together around the same time and remains to this day an unevenly cohesive place, its *lander* or states competing with each other in telling the nastiest jokes about the people across the state line.

The French are far from unified: northmen, southerners, Basques, Alsatians, Occitans and the Italians of the Riviera have no time for each other. And Switzerland? It barely has a head of state. Its 23 cantons, like Appenzellerland which eventually gave the women the vote a few years ago, are more sovereign and independent than most countries in the United Nations. Nor do the British or the Dutch escape this sort of scrutiny although they have hung together better than most.

So what's the lesson for Nepal in Europe's countless riffs and fault lines? Well, it's that national unity doesn't require a unified view of the nation. And that diverse ethnicities, language groups and landscapes can come together and foster prosperity, even after devastating wars and economic collapses. Look to Europe for many reasons, but don't see it as a land of pristine peace where all has been forever perfect and only wisdom has served the common well.

Think of those cattle rustlers of Appenzellerland, now schooling the world's warlords in the most humane ways of war and helping the hungry at every turn. But don't drink Bulgarian beer. Take your word for it. ♦

# Clear flows the Bagmati



Guliyewari, just north of Pashupati, is set up for sewage separation and water treatment plant, and also 25 hectares of private land along the river to build roads, a 20 metre greenbelt, and embankments. The plant at Kumarigul, Guliyewari, separates sewage entering the river from the Mitra Park and Gokarna areas and filters the water before releasing it into the river beyond Pashupati via an underground tunnel. Sludge, or sediment from the treated water, is pumped into drying beds, and the project hopes to sell or distribute it to the public as fertilizer.

So far, an estimated Rs 500 million has been spent on the project. "By the time we finish with this portion, it will cost a little over Rs 600 million," says project manager Ram Deep Shah.

An initial survey by the committee indicates that cleaning the river up all the way to Chovar will cost Rs 7 billion. "Speaking from experience, if all goes well in terms of funding and logistics, we can clean up the river all that way in two-and-a-half or three years," says Poudel. "But at the present rate of progress, it could take twenty years."

They are already experiencing some hitches. The foam that rises from the treatment plant every morning is an indication of chemical pollutants from the 68 industries—garments, carpets, dyeing, and small handicrafts—upstream. "Chemical pollutants slow down the water treatment process. It slows down the growth of bacteria that help clean the water." Numerous letters have been despatched to the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies to monitor the use of chemicals. "But they are not reacting as quickly as we would like them to," explains Poudel.

The term of the committee runs for just another three months, but members have recommended to the prime minister and the Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning to extend their term or set up another committee that will focus on cleaning up the rivers in the Valley—the Bishnumati, Manohara, Tukache, Hanamant, Dhobi Khola—and not just the Bagmati. "After coming so far, I don't think it's impossible," says Poudel, whose team has so far worked with the concerned VDCs, DDCs, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, as well as the concerned ministries and the public. "If the government and the public want it to happen and everyone works towards that goal, it's not impossible." But he also calls on civil society to help, to ensure that things go as planned. "If people like me form a voluntary Group, who have already expressed much concern about the state of the Bagmati, offer to clean up the area below Tilganga until Thapathali, I'd support them all the way." ♦

With a population that has surpassed 1.7 million, the Valley now generates 750 cubic metres of solid waste every year. About 70 percent of this is disposed by the municipality in various landfills, and 5-10 percent is recycled. But the rest is dumped on the banks of the river. The Bagmati is not just a sewer, but also a garbage dump.

The project initially acquired just over 4.5 hectares of land in



Guliyewari, just north of Pashupati, is set up for sewage separation and water treatment plant, and also 25 hectares of private land along the river to build roads, a 20 metre greenbelt, and embankments. The plant at Kumarigul, Guliyewari, separates sewage entering the river from the Mitra Park and Gokarna areas and filters the water before releasing it into the river beyond Pashupati via an underground tunnel. Sludge, or sediment from the treated water, is pumped into drying beds, and the project hopes to sell or distribute it to the public as fertilizer.

## On the box

There's no doubt about the glamour of television. But aren't politicians, enamoured with seeing themselves on the idiot box, over reacting? The Nepal Congress Central Working Committee found it a serious offense that state-run Nepal Television did not show faces of their top leaders—Girija Prasad Koirala, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Sher Bahadur Deuba—while covering the CWC's most recent meeting. Information and Communication Minister Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta received a note from the CWC seeking an explanation (within three days) when the major Congress leaders didn't appear on the news bulletin. We don't blame Gupta, who may have a better understanding of just what people don't want to see. Now if only NC bosses reacted like that on other more pressing issues facing the nation.

## Govinda Mainali

Human Rights activists visiting Govinda Mainali at the Tokyo Detention Centre last week says he's doing well—except of course the ordeal of having to spend time in a foreign jail for a crime he did not commit. After a prolonged trial beginning in 1987, the Nepali migrant worker was sentenced to life imprisonment on 22 December 2000. He was charged of murdering Yasuko Watanabe. Shortly afterwards, Mainali was tried at the Tokyo District Court, but on 14 April, 2000, judge Toshikazu Ouchi had pronounced him not guilty. Mainali was to be freed but the prosecutor filed an appeal and demanded the Tokyo High Court continue to detain him. The court complied with the request and in the trial that followed, even though there was no new evidence, the chief judge of the court Takagi Toshio, reversed the lower court's decision. Mainali was then sentenced to life imprisonment. This seemingly double-standard treatment meted out to a Nepali migrant worker whose only crime, if any, was over staying the visa permit, has galvanised many Japanese and Nepali nationals in Japan to form the 'Justice for Govinda' group. They believe that Mainali is innocent and are fighting to create public opinion in favour of Mainali and to lobby for his fair trial and acquittal.

## Dental help

Rotary International has given a grant to the National Dental Hospital to complete a maxillofacial center providing treatment for cleft palate, oral cancer care and accident trauma. This will be a free service for the poor. Experts have also recommended setting up a rural dental system in Nepal, which is not too heavy with the cost of traditional dental equipment and the need for centrally located clinics. But why you may ask.

The food habits of Nepalis, from Nepalgunj to Namche have changed and, among other things, that has resulted in an increase in dental diseases. That's what a WHO study conducted among children of the Khumbu region indicates. The shift from salt to sweet tea and sodas has led to a rise in dental diseases in remote mountain areas, where people usually don't have access to care. Even in Namche, where there is a well-equipped clinic, the dental standards are below those prescribed by the WHO. The study revealed very high decay levels, as well as the need for oral hygiene training and treatment for all children. "Very little exists in the way of research data on current decay and gum disease levels," says David Geddes, dental surgeon and mountaineer, involved in the study. It was also clear that many cleft palate patients and oral cancer sufferers in Nepal were unable to access dental treatments.

## Marathon men

Nepali runners dominated the recently concluded Annapurna Mandala Trail, which organisers say, is the 'world's highest race'. On 23 March, Dacchhi Sherpa, a Nepali living in Switzerland, raced his way to victory. The race, covering 320km over eight days, took 31 marathoners across rice paddy fields at 800m and up to a height of 5400m through the Thorong Pass, before descending to Dhampus, near Pokhara. Sherpa, currently considered one of the leading mountain runners in Europe, had a comfortable two-hour lead over Nar Bahadur Shah, winner of the previous two races across the Annapurna. Shah was followed by Sumba Sherpa, Babu Raja Shrestha and Pasang Sherpa.

IN THE APRIL

HIMAL

A SPECIAL LOOK\* AT THE  
MAOIST WAR

\*On news stands 1 April

# Funding fundamentals

I would take a full dose of hard-bored idealism to believe that the impending law on regulating the activities of political parties would end the horse-trading that has saddled the country with so much cynicism. But the outlook may not be all that bad if you consider House of Representatives Speaker Taranath Rana's sense of timing. He decided to forward the bill for the royal seal one day before the US Congress approved the biggest campaign-finance reform legislation in a generation.

Our bill, primarily aimed at preventing political parties from amassing unlimited amounts of money in contributions, had been languishing in the upper house for one-and-a-half years after getting through the lower chamber. The 19<sup>th</sup> session of parliament couldn't consider the measure because the opposition parties wanted Girija Prasad Koirala to step down as prime minister first. When ruling-party and opposition MPs expanded their squabble to establish whether the Lauda Air South West deal was clearer than the China South West accord, the bill plunged to new depths of uncertainty.

Assessing his prospects to forward the measure to the palace without the elders' consent last week, Rana's task the moral high ground. By citing the failure of the upper house to abide by the constitutional responsibility to return a finance bill to the lower chamber within 15 days, the speaker reaffirmed the supremacy of representatives the people directly elect. You could easily get a sense of the urgency prevailing in the opposition camp as well. The UML's chief whip, Bharat

Mohan Adhikari, said his party welcomed Rana's decision, although he personally couldn't remember the bill's salient features.

Sceptics always wondered how incumbents could seriously agree to dismantle a system that they have profited from. Conspiracy theorists believe the lower house simply edged on the elders to sit on the bill in order to avoid filibusters their constituents would never have forgiven. As individuals less beholden to the influences of social and hard money—at least in the public mind—upper house MPs stand a better chance of confronting allegations of obstructionism.

Now we understand why the Nepali Congress and the UML have been pampering the smaller parties all these years. The original draft of the bill envisaged state funding of parties based

on the votes they received in the last election. Sensing an imminent cash crunch, the smaller parties succeeded in deleting that provision from the version being sent to the palace. In doing so, they also returned the favour to the big players. (Even if you can't win enough votes to form the government, take pride in your nuisance value.)

Once the bill is stamped into law, all recognised parties would have to submit an annual report to the Election Commission, detailing their sources of income and items of expenditure. They would also have to maintain a record of donations of Rs 5,000 and more. The idea is to ensure that every central committee meeting, tree plantation programme and shadowy signature campaign is fully accounted for. You can figure out what kind of opportunities this would create for imaginative auditors.

## Attempting to regulate the cash flow of political parties is noble, but it could mean the spread of chronic enronitis.

Advocates of the status quo waged a gallant struggle until the very end. If something isn't broken, why fix it? After all, the country has held three parliamentary elections and two local elections since the restoration of democracy 12 years ago. Moreover, all major parties have held several national and regional conventions, undergoing splits and syntheses, sparing the people the tedium of having to go through their profit-and-loss accounts.

Leaders have been running parties with collections from businessmen and proceeds from fund-raising drives either from the centre of power or from the periphery. One businessman recalls how he had once assembled the entire UML leadership in his second-floor office in a dark-by-lane-in-the-city centre. He insists he's an equal opportunity benefactor. Name any big name in the ruling party and there's a good chance he'll give you a memorised summary of disbursements complete with titles, time and amounts. (By the way, he never forgets to mention how touched he was by the thriftiness of some of the leaders who form the core of today's Maoist leadership.)

Things were easy until someone realised that not a single party had offered its accounts for public scrutiny. If politicians who have no problem with flaunting their net worth are so zealous



## Books out of balance

There is a general slowdown in revenue collection across the board—excise has been the hardest hit due to the slowdown in the production and sale of goods in the domestic market. Official figures for excise until mid-February show collection down by about 8 percent. The collection in Falgun was about Rs 2.20 billion, against the budgetary target of about Rs 4.87 billion. Likewise, there has also been a slowdown in the collection of Value Added Tax (VAT), which grew by about 3 percent in mid-February to Rs 7.64 billion. Going by the monthly average, even VAT will fall short of the Rs 14.75 billion projected by this year's budget. When the Finance Ministry sits down to do calculations near the end of the fiscal year, it may have a shortfall of Rs 6 billion compared to the budget estimate, sources tell us.

## Lower spread

Commercial banks have lowered the spread in the buying and selling rates of the greenback from Rs 75 to Rs 6.60 effective Friday. Banks began buying the dollar for Rs 77.35 and sold it for Rs 77.95 (Thursday's buying and selling rates were Rs 77.50 and Rs 78.05 respectively). For the past 11 years banks in Nepal had kept a one-percent margin between the two rates.

## Two dates

If you're looking at what Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba achieved in New Delhi last week, here are two deadlines: One is June 2002 for finalising the Detailed Project Report for the Pancheshwor Project, which was supposed to have been completed last year, and the other is to do the same with the rail operation agreement.

Nepal and India are to negotiate and finalise the rail operation agreement between Birgunj and Naxal to begin operations at the Inland Container Depot, which was ready early this year. Deuba and his Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee have given officials until 23 June to get that done.

Nepal has already brought in Trans Nepal Freight Services to run two other ICDS at Biratnagar and Bhairahawa, which do not yet have rail connections. It has been unable to select a company to run the ICD at Birgunj, as it does not have a rail operation agreement with India.

## Biometrics

Having problems keeping up with the time sheets of your staff, or tired of dealing with customers complaining of forgotten passwords and Personal Identification Numbers (PINs)? Biometrics might be the solution to both, says the Microhard Institute of Technology (MIT), which recently began marketing the high-tech solution. For the uninitiated, biometrics allows using tracking technology to scan body parts such as irises or fingerprints for use as ID keys.

## Garments

Prithvi Rai Lital, vice chairman of the National Planning Commission, told garment producers this week that we cannot afford to lose the industry which earns Nepal the most money. But businessmen at the Annual General Meeting of the Garment Association of Nepal (GAN) were unimpressed. "Is there anything still left to be lost?" asked one. "I've lost everything," Lital's speech and the business' response typify the distance between policy makers and things on the ground, where industry estimates say that almost 80 percent of factories have closed shop. The industry, which is worth roughly Rs 10 billion in terms of investment, used to employ over 50,000 people before the slump began late last year. Now, few are bothering to count.



## INTERVIEW

# “What people recognise is good value for health care.”



**Increasingly, Nepalis in need of medical treatment are going not to India, but to Thailand, combining check-ups or surgery with tourism and shopping. Nepali Times spoke to Ruben Toral, director of international programs at Bumrungrad Medical Center in Bangkok**

**Nepali Times: How do your services and prices for Nepalis compare with treatment in India?**

**Ruben Toral:** For most Nepalis seeking medical treatment overseas, India has traditionally been the destination of choice based largely on price and proximity. Based on my experience and talking to patients who know both systems, I believe that we offer a better package than India when comparing price, service, quality and facility. In general, we will be 10 percent more expensive than an Indian hospital like Apollo or Escorts, but our service standards and facilities are far superior. I am often told

by patients from Nepal and South Asia that our hospital runs very efficiently and the service standards are excellent. That, I believe, is well worth the 10 percent premium, especially when your comfort and care are concerned.

**What do Nepalis come here for mainly?**

By and large, Nepalis are coming for specialty care, cardiology in particular. That said, we see a lot of patients coming for comprehensive health screenings and other out-patient services. I think that the Nepalis like the fact that this is a one-stop centre, and that we can provide outpatient, diagnostics, and inpatient care all under one roof. It is very time efficient.

**Can Asian medical standards challenge western medical facilities?**

That depends on the medical institution and the country. Bumrungrad, for example, is the first and only hospital in Asia that is accredited by the JCI—a US-based hospital accreditation organisation—that measures our capabilities based on criteria used for US hospitals. Here, you will find American management, US- and UK-trained and board-certified physicians, a top to bottom quality control program, advanced equipment, and a five-star facility. I think that Bumrungrad operates at levels that challenge western medical facilities, and that medical standards in Asia, on the whole, are improving.

**Does South Asia provide a large enough market for you to think of venturing here? What is the market in Nepal like?**

South Asia is a very large and important market for us in terms of patients seen and treated. As far as 'ventures' are concerned, we are quite active regionally developing medical exchange programs, but much less focused on building or co-venturing on building satellite facilities. We have medical programs active in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. As for Nepal, we are currently working with the National Heart Center (SNGHC) to further develop their capabilities in invasive cardiology. In fact, a team from SNGHC is training with us right now.

# Bank(ruptcy) woes



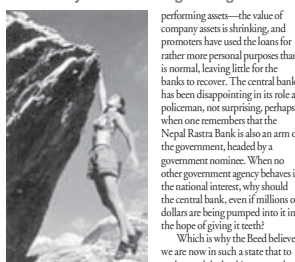
Forget about propping up the economy without a strong banking sector.

Having just read the about the visit to India of the Nepali prime minister on page 5 of the *Calcutta papers*, I thought it best, for reasons of national pride and self-confidence, not to delve into matters relating to the relations between our two countries, but discuss more pertinent issues at home.

We all know this by now: the French banking company Crédit Agricole wants to pull out of Nepal Indusbank. That decision was left to the court and power politics, but though a ruling has been passed that is supposed to allow Crédit Agricole to exit, we all know about the slips between the cup and the lip. No doubt the French firm will not rest in peace until it sees the money—in France.

The Nepal Rastra Bank has also ensured that the directors of Nepal Bank Limited quit for reasons known to all, asked the chairman of a private bank to step down, and dissolved the board of the Lambini Bank. The consultants who are to take over management of the Rastriya Banijya Bank are just waiting for the right moment to arrive. Meanwhile the Agricultural Development Bank has problems, as do rural banks. It seems as if other than a certain other pressing problem, banking is also set to be staple news items to rely on.

The first spate of reforms resulted in a mushrooming of banks and financial institutions, but set out no adequate legislative and regulatory framework for them to work within. One may argue that the financial sector is difficult to regulate even in developed nations, but consider this in the Nepali context. We allowed banks to be



opened by people already in business and who, of course, allowed individuals and promoter groups to be involved in more than one bank at any time. With lax norms regarding ownership, management and governance, banks became a business that thrived on conflict of interest.

Regarding collateral as the only means of securitisation, banks treated the problem of cash-flow and business strength as secondary. Project finance is still a distant reality, and funding in a venture capital mode, impossible. Banks have targeted the limited business of funding against mortgages. But with development banks, finance companies and finance co-operatives also vying for that pie, everyone's slice is getting smaller. Competition is increasing, but its only effect is that margins are shrinking, putting pressure on the borrower.

The other matter plaguing the banking sector is the issue of non-

performing assets—the value of company assets is shrinking, and promoters have used the loans for rather more personal purposes than is normal, leaving little for the banks to recover. The central bank has been disappointing in its role as policeman, not surprising, perhaps, when one remembers that the Nepal Rastra Bank is also an arm of the government, headed by a government nominee. When no other government agency behaves in the national interest, why should the central bank, even if millions of dollars are being pumped into it in the hope of giving it teeth?

Which is why the *Beed* believes we are now in such a state that to understand the banking system here at all, we need to focus on the chance of survival of not just private banks, but also the regulator. Banks should be given leeway to merge and amalgamate, to make operations more efficient and productive. For banking companies to be viable in the long run, we need economies of scale. Quantity, not only quality. The central bank should live up to its role as regulator, if it issues guidelines, it needs to ensure that they are adhered to. It needs to facilitate decision-making, and develop an image as a regulator that is proactive. The way it handled the divestment of Indusbank points to a lot of things that need to be addressed.

The banking sector provides vitally-needed infrastructure for business, trade and commerce. If it weakens, the entire economy feels the pinch. ♦

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

COMMENTARY

# Reply to Baburam

“It is rude to invite guests with all sorts of conditions attached.”

Dr Baburam Bhattacharya, Namaste from Massachusetts, USA

I am an American citizen and a frequent visitor and lover of "materially poor but spiritually rich" Nepal, as you so eloquently put it. Your fax of March 15, 2002, was recently forwarded to me by a Nepali friend, and I would like to respond to your "invitation" to us foreign tourists to visit Nepal—even though your communist party is even going the other way, against a fascist monarchist state.

What struck me immediately upon reading your fax were the inherent contradictions in your invitation. While you declare magnanimously, "Foreign tourists are most welcome in the country and will be so in future as well,"

you then go on to advise us to take "special precautionary measures while travelling during the period of war."

I cannot help but recall the folk tale in which a jackal invites a long-beaked stork to dinner and serves food on flat plates. The shameless host the jackal laps up his dinner, his guest remains hungry because his beak is useless in feeding itself. In the story, the stork has his revenge, but that is irrelevant right now. I must say that your invitation is reminiscent of the hypocritical jackal. In a nation where guests are supposedly equivalent to you, you will agree it is rude to invite guests with all sorts of conditions attached.

For instance, you warn tourists not to patronise certain tourism services because the Nepali tourism industry "is monopolised by the arch-reactionary Shah-Rana family and their close courtiers." Respected Doctor, how are tourists to arrive in Nepal if they are not to fly into your country, seek shelter in hotels and take buses (or fly) to enchanting towns like Pokhara or Chitwan? They couldn't possibly take a boat, since Nepal remains a land-locked country, if my current world atlas is accurate. While Indian tourists (whom you also say you welcome with open arms) may entertain the real possibility of walking into Nepal and lodging with relatives and friends, and temples within

lised by the arch-reactionary Shah-Rana family and their close courtiers." Respected Doctor, how are tourists to arrive in Nepal if they are not to fly into your country, seek shelter in hotels and take buses (or fly) to enchanting towns like Pokhara or Chitwan? They couldn't possibly take a boat, since Nepal remains a land-locked country, if my current world atlas is accurate. While Indian tourists (whom you also say you welcome with open arms) may entertain the real possibility of walking into Nepal and lodging with relatives and friends, and temples within

Kathmandu (and thus consider their vacation as a pilgrimage), western tourists are separated from your lovely nation by vast oceans and seas. Personally speaking, whenever I visit, I do not—by far cannot—afford the luxury of such extravagant establishments because, you see, my pet bourgeois purse is much too meagre. Like you, I want my money to benefit the Nepalis with whom I come into contact, and not flow back to the foreign nations. So I stay in family-owned lodges, hire local guides and drivers with surnames like Lama, Tamang, Gurung, Sherpa, Gaudaha, Thapa, Biswakarma with the hope that the wages I paid them will help support the family, send children to school and put food on the table.

However, I must take the buses or fly to various towns, and if by doing this I've propped up the "fascist monarchist state," then so be it. But then, why bother extending your heartfelt welcome? And have you ever bothered to figure out what you do with your "peoples' war" to wreck the tourism industry in Nepal and therefore deprive hundreds of thousands of porters, vegetable

farmers, lodge-owners, taxi drivers, and guides of their jobs? Or was that your intention all along: to wreck the economy so you can come to power quicker?

Your bands have in fact begun to alienate and damage those very people you wish to liberate. The peasants, the proletariat and the petit bourgeoisie are caught between treachery and extortion of your cadre and the counter-insurgency operations of the army, police and other branches of the government. But instead of alleviating their suffering, your supporters are augmenting it. Your militia are carrying out plunder, mayhem and murder of petty shop owners, families who run lodges and guest houses along the trekking trails.

I believe Mao himself was most explicit in not persecuting the peasants and workers. He offered full support in order to achieve the aims of a revolutionary war. While every revolutionary poses "political" to quote Mao's famous "Quicksilver" power flows from the barrel of a gun," he is so conscientiously forges many of Mao's mundane but enlightening rules he imposed upon the revolutionary Red soldiers, such as "no confiscation from peasants," "pay for all articles purchased," "be courteous and helpful when you can."

Your party and cadres are neither winning the hearts and minds of the Nepali people, nor the international propaganda war when they are accused of brutally assassinating school teachers,

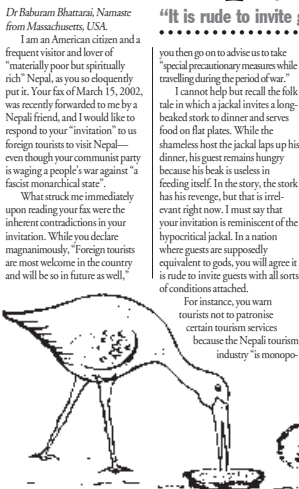
burning innocent children and children to death by torching a public bus or mutilating the wounded and the dead. Sorry to say, but your revolution seems to be going the way of the Cultural Revolution circa 1968 when millions of Chinese peasants died of starvation, Stalin's gulags and the Khmer Rouge.

The irony is that many people, myself included, actually agree with you that centuries of injustice, exploitation, degradation and inequality, among other social evils prevalent in Nepal (as well as every other nation on earth), must end. But I firmly part with you on the means of achieving that end. For you and your ilk, destruction and death are considered "collateral damage"—an inevitable and necessary process in achieving the aims of the glorious revolution. And to ask you to renounce violence is sure to be considered a *shiksha* no sanction violation.

I want to assure you that I do plan to visit Nepal again and again, and we request others to do so too. For we believe that now more than ever, Nepal needs us urgently. After all, the star hotels and well-connected agencies have enough financial and other clout to stay afloat. It is the small lodges, tea-shops and porters who need us most.

Until we see a "war" to convince you that I am not just a fair-weather friend of Nepal but a friend for all seasons. ♦

Paul Baccon, Massachusetts, USA





HEMLATA RAI

Most Nepali teenagers turn to friends rather than family members or teachers to talk about their private problems and share in most thoughts. Parents are too squeamish to talk about sex, teachers are bound by taboos, and Nepali youngsters have nowhere to turn to except their peers.

More than 80 percent of the teenagers in the nationwide survey conducted by UNICEF last year said they turned to their friends when they needed information on sexual matters. Only 10 percent approached their teachers, 10 percent of the girls said they talked to their sisters about these things. Parents came way down in the list: only 3.5 percent talked to their mothers, and even fewer, 1.4 percent asked their dads.

The survey showed teenagers worry mainly about having enough money, about their education, about getting a job, and they have lots of questions about love and marriage. Respondents in the survey were boys and girls between 12-18 years, and 22 percent of boys had already had sex, half of them with multiple partners. Only nine percent of the girls had sex, and

among them 14 percent had got pregnant. The teenagers all had questions about sex and marriage, about sexually-transmitted diseases, about pregnancy, masturbation and homosexuality. But they did not have a reliable and responsible source of information.



Now they do. Nepali teenagers worry mainly about having enough money, about their education, about getting a job, and they have lots of questions about love and marriage. Respondents in the survey were boys and girls between 12-18 years, and 22 percent of boys had already had sex, half of them with multiple partners. Only nine percent of the girls had sex, and

team gets from all over Nepal. Sathi is produced for a target audience of teenagers, but there are queries from young adults and even 30-something women and men. Barely ten months after starting, Sathi is already getting 200 letters and emails every week, and the questions range from marriage, careers, friendship, pregnancy, extra-marital sex, and even incest and rape. Listeners in remote corners of Nepal have formed over 100 "listeners clubs" where youngsters gather around their shortwave radio sets on Saturdays at 3:30 PM to listen to the programme which carries an entertaining but informative radio drama, songs, and a half-hour letter answering session.

"Nepali youth are never encouraged to talk about sex, and they have little access to information. They worry, and have no one to turn to," says 24-year-old Sushma Shrestha, the leader of the Sathi production team. The audience is encouraged to write about problems, which are discussed on air in the hope that it will benefit others with the same problems. Since the identities of the letter writers are protected, they

find it easy to share secrets with Sushma's team which also includes Bhaskar Gyawali, Toya Chhinire, Sangita Budathoki, Devendra Shrestha and Bineta Shrestha. The production team meets at its office in Pulchowk every week to wade through hundreds of letters, mostly written in pages torn out of exercise books, picking out the most relevant ones which would benefit the maximum numbers of listeners with similar problems. The studio work is done at Radio Nepal which has a separate team to produce the radio dramas.

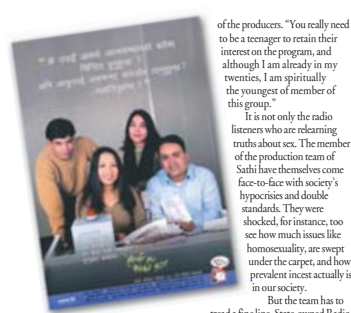
Last week, Bhaskar, Toya, Sangita and Sushma sat around the table, taking turns reading their choice of letters to the others. They ranged from a cry of help from a 21-year-old woman who had kept the secret of being raped by a relative when she was ten, and had finally mustered the courage to write to Sathi. She wants to know whether she should tell her husband if the gets married. (The team firm commended her on her inner strength and moral courage, then weighed her pros and cons of telling her future husband, asking her to be careful about the

unpredictable consequences on the male ego.) There was a letter from a 19-year-old college student from Syangju with the familiar problem of not wanting to get married to a boy the parents had chosen for her. She writes that she is not ready to get married, and asks for advice on how she should tackle her parents. (Sathi's advice: she needs to try to convince her parents that she is not yet ready to get married, but she also needs to understand why her parents are in such a hurry and develop her own counter-arguments.)

The production team discusses each problem in detail, trying to come up with the most helpful, most appropriate answers, and options least likely to exacerbate problems for the letter writer. All those around the table agree on the answers, like the point that have to be made. They try not to be prescriptive, or offer specific suggestions. More often than not, the answers try to tell letter writers to analyse their own feelings, look into the consequences of their actions, try to solve problems and not be rash or vengeful—all advice that would also apply to the daily

# Someone I can talk to...

What are the things that bother Nepali teenagers? Who do they talk to about their innermost concerns? To whom do Nepali adolescents turn to when they want to learn about sex? Is the information they get correct and useful?



of the producers. "You really need to be a teenager to retain their interest on the program, and although I am already in my twenties, I am spiritually the youngest, I am a member of this group."

It is not only the radio listeners who are learning truths about sex. The member of the production team of Sathi have themselves come face-to-face with society's hypocrisies and double standards. They were shocked, for instance, to see how much issues like homosexuality, are swept under the carpet, and how prevalent incest actually is in our society.

But the team has to tread a fine line. State-owned Radio Nepal has its own norms that it can't overstep. The programme is a complete departure from the usual fare of Radio Nepal.

From the feedback there is tremendous and unprecedented response," says Rajendra Sharma of Radio Nepal. "We are not censoring dilemmas of thousands of other listeners all over Nepal. When a particularly poignant letter is read out, team members look downcast and shake their heads. There is a long silence before the suggestions start coming in to help someone turn their life around. There is an attempt not to get too emotionally involved with the problems of letter-writers, to be rational and cool-headed. Which is also their advice: it was important to coach youngsters to be strong, self-confident and mature, to analyse a problem and think ahead to see if the solution is fair to all concerned, confront the real issue, don't shy away from a tough decision, be self-critical, talk things over with parents, try to understand why others act the way they do.

The sessions are intense, the team members let off steam by cracking jokes and laugh at some of their own problems. The team gets help from life-skills experts from UNICEF who help co-produce the program. "It's a program for young people produced by young people," says Toya, who at 27 is the oldest

content, it's not what we say but how we say it. The content should not be overly vulgar, otherwise we have no objection to other analysis of even issues like masturbation or homosexuality."

Says one of the producers, Sangita Budathoki: "Before we started Sathi, I never imagined Nepal had sex as such a young age. This means they are vulnerable because of the dangers of unprotected sex. There are more than 33,500 Nepalis who have HIV, and AIDS is going to be the number one killer of Nepalis in the 15-49 age group by the year 2010.

Nearly 60 percent of people with HIV are under 30 and nearly 10 percent adolescents. A Family Health International (FHI) study conducted among 800 youths reveals more than 71 percent of them had their first sexual encounter before age 19. Despite awareness of condom use and safe sex practices, Nepali youths are still having unprotected sex, according to the FHI survey.

"Nepali youth are concerned and alert, they want to achieve something in life, but they don't have too many people to counsel them or give them guidance on personal, private matters. They are confused and frustrated, and turn to drugs and unprotected sex," explains Bhaskar.

It is the dramatic rise in injecting drug use in urban centres and its combination with unprotected sex that is most worrying. One recent survey puts the number at anywhere up to 60,000 and they are in the 16-25 age bracket. More than half of them are already HIV positive, and many of those have multiple sex partners. This almost guarantees the spread of HIV and infections like Hepatitis B into the general population.

"Communication is the first line of defence," says UNICEF's Wing-See Cheng, who oversees the Sathi project. "Our objective is to reach Nepali youth about life skills, the set of core abilities that enable young people deal with the demands and challenges of



The weekly meeting to select letters from listeners and responses. At the Radio Nepal studio, Sushma Shrestha (on mike) with Bhaskar Gyawali, Toya Chhinire and other colleagues.

everyday life." UNICEF identifies ten interdependent skills like self-awareness, communication, interpersonal relationships, decision making and problem solving as the life skills. The survey of teenagers showed that more than 90 percent of Nepali teenagers had a clear goal in life, and they could articulate their biggest worries and fears.

By teaching life skills as a generic everyday ability, Cheng says listeners will be groomed to be emotionally independent, confident and able to tackle other problems in life.

These are learnable skills, and these skills make huge differences on how you perceive yourself and your attitude towards life," says Bineta Shrestha, who says producing Sathi has helped her become more focused and less confused about her own priorities. Bhaskar says he learnt to cope

with his emotions. Sangita says she learnt self-awareness and gained decision making abilities, while Toya thinks he's more positive about life and now realises that sharing problems with others can help find a better solution.

Says Cheng: "In a very short time, Sathi has become one of the most popular youth programmes on radio, we hope to build on this." A television version of the programme, called "Carmandu" and broadcast every Saturday on Nepal TV has also been launched. This Nepal education by radio is unique even by international standards, and is already being talked about as an initiative comparable to South African television's highly-rated Soul City. In future, Sathi Sangta Man Ka Kura hopes to be even more interactive and more responsive to more listeners also in rural areas. ♦

Sathi Sangta Man Ka Kura is broadcast every Saturday 3:30-4:30 PM on Radio Nepal national network on medium wave and shortwave. It is rebroadcast during the week on the following FM stations: HBC 94 FM Kathmandu, HITS FM 92.1 Kathmandu, Classic FM 100 Kathmandu, Kosi FM 93.4 in Biratnagar, Lumini FM 96.8 in Butwal, Annapurna FM 93.4 Pokhara, and Swargadwari FM 102.8 in Dang.

Carmandu is broadcast on Saturdays at 7:00-7:30 PM on Nepal Television. Email: [cwfriends@hotmail.com](mailto:cwfriends@hotmail.com)

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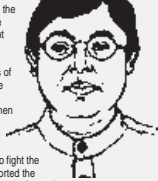


by MANJUSHREE THAPA

# 'Writers don't carry guns'

Gunraj Luitel in Kantipur, 26 March

Are the security forces fighting the Maoists or journalists? Why are they finding it necessary to fight journalists? Especially at a time when the press has been very critical of the inhuman activities of the Maoists. Besides, it was the press that first pointed out the Talibanisation of the Maoists when they began to force schools to shut down. Those incidents show that the security forces don't need to attack the press to fight the Maoists. It was the press supported the emergency. Who should the security forces be targeting in such a situation, the press or the Maoists?



If Shyam Shrestha (editor of Mulyakan) was arrested because they thought him to be a Maoist, then it shows their lack of information and analysis. Shrestha was one of the most vocal opponents of 'militarisation' within the Maoist party. He advocated that over-stressing militarisation and under stressing 'mass uprising' would result in a lesser 'he was arrested' for having Maoist contacts, then it was government that requested him to set up contact (in the context of the talks). He had tried to mediate.

By any other name, the government as he has not been able to give a convincing reason why over 75 journalists have been arrested. It is not right to oppress any one with a pen irrespective of his or her ideology. Today's need is to get guns out of the hands of those who are carrying them, not taking away pens from writers and journalists. It was during similar hot dry days of Chaitra (in 1980) that we had the People's Movement, which centred one aim and that to harbour the ideology of choice... Is it right to accuse anyone with a certain ideology of being a terrorist on the basis of their beliefs?

Hopelessness is gradually setting in. Everyday soldiers carrying guns are being arrested, and are held incommunicado. Irrespective of whether that is Om Sharma, Govinda Acharya or Manrishi Dixit, all of them are largely those that work with words. They have no relation with the gun. It could be that they believe that guns can also help bring change. Some may believe that progress can take place through violence, others by other means. People have different convictions. But there is no danger to democracy from those that don't carry guns.

Those pens weave every time there is bloodshed in some remote village, caused by either the Maoists or the security forces. Reading these news, sometimes the Maoists may be happy and sometimes the security forces. Irrespective of which side is happy, there is only one truth, the pen continuously weeps, reporting facts. The pen is only a means to make the voiceless heard...

...in the end, it is the people holding the pen that become victims of explosives, say, like the one placed at the Gorkhatra. It is the weak that are attacked. Common people are being killed almost daily, sometimes for being 'informants' and at other times for being 'terrorists'... Of course the Maoists also made a group of journalists captives when they visited Rojpa for reporting last year. On both side we can see a trend—extend a 'red carpet' when things are suited to them and threaten (journalists) when the situation is not conducive.

Why fear words? The pen only shows the way out of the dark. It only helps you to overcome your bad deeds. If you want to enjoy the darkness, then there is little to say... Even if journalists write about your wrongs and corruption (and you don't like it), there is legal redress available. But truth cannot be buried by killing the messengers.

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

You don't fight a sparrow with a cannon. You have to face the problem head on.

—Chakra Prasad Bastola, Central Committee Member, Nepal Congress in Doshanra, 24 March.



Hello! Prachanda ji, isn't it time to change the prime minister?

Prakash Weekly, 18 March

## Terror insurance

Himal Karmacharya  
14 March-4 April, 2002

When veteran insurance expert Dr. Prasad Karmacharya was doing a course at the College of Insurance in London in 1972, the professor gave him an assignment: calculate the total loss if two fully-loaded 727s crashed into the Empire State Building. Karmacharya remembers thinking that such imaginary insurance risk assessments were unrealistic. Thirty years later, 11 September happened and the total losses were nearly \$80 billion. The terrorist attacks shook the entire insurance world and played havoc with premiums.

The aftermaths of 11 September were felt half a world away in Nepal, with a dramatic increase in insurance premium. Karmacharya, who is now with Neco Insurance, estimates that rates are going to increase even more. The Nepal Bank Limited and the Rasraya Banija Bank would pay up to Rs 1.4 million in premium every year, they now pay Rs 5 million.

Things here have been made worse by the Maoist insurgency. The cost of insurance in Nepal has gone up seven times. That in turn has affected civil aviation the most. Insurers who used to calculate war- or terrorist-related risk 0.01 percent of the value of the aircraft, now use a seven percent formula.

When the Maoists started attacking helicopters, the premium load on helicopter operators has suddenly shot up. So far the Maoists have destroyed or damaged helicopters belonging to Air Ananya, Asian Airlines and the Royal Nepal Army. Airlines have received a double whammy: premiums have gone up, but turnover has plummeted. They are therefore looking for re-insurance, and here they are drifting away from expensive European re-insurers who charge up to seven percent premium, towards African and Indian ones who take half that.

Foxtel Air received prompt reimbursement from its Indian re-insurer after a helicopter went down in Rara lake last November, and this has encouraged other operators to shift away from the Europeans. Says Deep Prakash Pandey of Everest Insurance: "We

now see that re-insurance is possible through India, for the first time we've got paid in American dollars through an Indian company."

## 'No' referendum

Nepal Jagaran, 25 March

Bal Bahadur Rai, 82, is the oldest member of the ageing Nepal Congress leadership. Excerpts from an interview:

## Dial more digits

Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 March

Acting on rapidly increasing demand, the Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) has decided to add a seventh digit to the six-digit numbers already in use in the Valley, and add a sixth one to the five-digit numbers used in areas outside the Valley.

## On constitutional amendment

I don't agree that you cannot amend the constitution during an emergency. We are trying to do just that to resolve the political stalemate. You should not view with suspicion the demands of the opposition parties to evaluate the 11 years we're tried out of the constitution.

## On change of leadership

I don't see a possibility of an immediate change. Whoever will come, will come from the Nepal Congress. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has to perform better; he has to be more proactive. For nine months (starting end-December 2000) he headed the commission that was responsible for finding a way to resolve the Maoist problem, and he then went on to become prime minister. But the Maoists were given too much freedom during the ceasefire (July-November 2001), that is why today the country is in this position today. Deuba even used to say, "Prachanda is a very intelligent person..." and on one day he freed 66 rebels from jail. The result: the attacks on Dang, Sotika and Syangja. The Maoists have repeatedly trashed him.

## On having a referendum

I don't see the need for a referendum [to bring the Maoists into the mainstream]. The people are simple and don't understand what constitutional amendments mean. They neither know what a Constituent Assembly is, nor what type of constitution is best suited for us. The people will listen and do what the political parties say. That is why the matter of amending the constitution should be left to the politicians and intellectuals.

## Violent means to political ends

We carried the guns that the Maoists are now carrying in the 1950s. But we didn't kill ordinary people. When we faced the forces of the Rana, some died on both sides... The Maoists are taking away food from the poor; they are looting villagers' personal property and killing political opponents. Can this be called a political revolution? It is oppression, terrorism. Our revolution was to establish democracy but the Maoist revolution wants to dismantle the basic foundations of democracy. You cannot compare guns taken up by Congress with

what the Maoists are doing. On corrupt ministers

The news of corruption that appears in the newspapers daily is shameful. There are charges against some [ministers] in the party's disciplinary committee. We are investigating the allegations. If they are found guilty the party will take strong action against them... If people want to earn money they should leave the party and begin a business or set up an industry. A political party is not the place for that... disciplinary action will be taken against those who cross the line.

## Ask the people

Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 March

The current, deepening crisis, is definitely Nepal's problem. There can never be a military solution to the problem. Nor can the problem be resolved with the assistance we're expecting from the neighbouring country because keeping in mind the traditional Nepal-India relationship, the policies of the South Block regarding this issue are inconsistent. Officially India from the very beginning has opposed the spread of terrorism in Nepal. But media, directed by the same institution seem to have a very different opinion. They have refused to term the Maoists war as a terrorist activity. Some articles, comments and editorials published in the media supporting the South Block bear testimony to this fact. Even the democrats and progressive minds there seem to share this opinion.

## TIME AND THE HILL

The girls who cut grass were cutting grass

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UNIVERSITY OF NEPAL

Prakash Weekly, 18 March

### NEPALITERATURE

# The Harsh Beauty of Rural Nepal Tirtha Shrestha

Talking to Gandhruk, a friend once cried, "Look at these fields, think of the work put into cultivating them. So much suffering! I don't like villages at all!" This was not a typical response to the breathtaking vista before us; but then my friend was not a typical tourist to Gandhruk, which is, let us face it, the Thamel of the hills. She was born in a village in Nepal, and had grown up doing the backbreaking work of fetching water, collecting dung, gathering firewood, weeding the fields, and performing the other chores that make life in the village so arduous. She could not look beyond the hardship of rural life to appreciate the beauty of the land.

Tirtha Shrestha brings to his poems a similar recognition of the harshness of rural life. He writes not just of poverty, but of the dreams, desires, aspirations of those who live in Nepal's villages and small towns. But though he cannot ignore the suffering of people, he does acknowledge the splendor of the land as well. There is a fine interplay of romance and social criticism in his best poems.

## Ask the people

The girls who cut grass were cutting grass

## SINDHUPALCHOK

The sorrow of lost innocence becomes an agreeable song and sounds a monsoon melody on the corrugated tin roof

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and cutting down others in their talk They didn't realise as they cut down others they were cutting through adoloes cence

Reaching the top of the hill they stopped cutting grass stopped cutting down others gathered a few stones and fixed their time which had petrified like stone They made offerings to it they prayed to it

## THE WOMEN AT THE WATER TAP

The women at the water tap are more frolicsome than water their lips move more rapidly than the liquid lips of water

## TIME AND THE HILL

The girls who cut grass were cutting grass

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rocks back and forth waving the branches of laughter To one side the moon covers its face with a shawl and weeps

A resident of Pokhara, Shrestha has written unresentfully about his home in the next poem, below.

## THE WOMEN AT THE WATER TAP

The women at the water tap are more frolicsome than water their lips move more rapidly than the liquid lips of water

## TIME AND THE HILL

The girls who cut grass were cutting grass

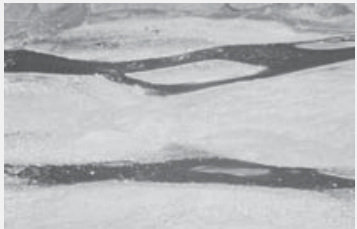
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in the thick pockets of the white skinned

In the final poem below, Shresth returns to the theme of women, theme that he writes about with an empathy rarely witnessed in today's male writers and poets.

## THE WOMEN AT THE WATER TAP

The women at the water tap are more frolicsome than water their lips move more rapidly than the liquid lips of water

## TIME AND THE HILL

The girls who cut grass were cutting grass

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The women at the water tap fill their jars singing songs of dissatisfaction Sometimes they become more licentious than the crests and ripples of water Sometimes they appear more peaceable than a pool

These poems are translated from Shrestha's 2001 collection, Jindajiko Kurukshetraabaaba.

## THE WOMEN AT THE WATER TAP

The women at the water tap are more frolicsome than water their lips move more rapidly than the liquid lips of water

## TIME AND THE HILL

The girls who cut grass were cutting grass

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**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITION**  
 ♦ **The Wild Tribes Of Ethiopia** American photographer Robert Stutzinski. Park Gallery, Pulchowk, until 31 March. 10AM-6PM, except Saturdays. 522307  
 ♦ **Prints by Noriko Saito**, Japan. On show at the Siddharth Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisted. 18-31 March. 11AM-6PM except Saturdays.  
 ♦ **Lives and Work of Nepalese Children** Exhibition of the work of Nepali child photographers. 28 March - 13 April. Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal. 220735  
 ♦ **Made in Janakpur: A Mithila Yatra** Three-day art camp with seven Nepali artists and three Indian artists. 26-30 March. Exhibition at the Janakpur Chamber of Commerce and Industries. For details contact Siddharth Art Gallery, 41122.

**EVENTS**  
 ♦ **Celebrating Womanhood** Fashion show depicting the different stages in the life of a woman, conceptualised and choreographed by Shirjina Singh Yonjan. 31 March. 6:30PM. Hyatt Regency. Tickets Rs 1500 with dinner. Rs 2500 per couple. Contact 419974 10AM-5PM for further information.  
 ♦ **Aspects of Jain Thought and Practice** Talk by Professor Jayandra Soni, Marburg University. 1 April. 4PM. Royal Nepal Academy, Kamaladi. Organised by the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University. Kathmandu and the Royal Nepal Academy.  
 ♦ **Easter Market** Handcrafted products by patients of the Shanti Sewa Griha, Pashupati. 29-31 March. Mike's Breakfast. Naxal.  
 ♦ **Tea and Talk Program** American Artists Influenced by the Art and Culture of South Asia, and Vice Versa by Kathryn Myers, University of Connecticut. 29 March. 4:30PM. American Centre Auditorium, Gyaneshwor. Organised by the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal.  
 ♦ **Rally for Peace** From Bhadrakali Temple via Shahid Gate to Hospital-Jamal. Tindhara Pathshala-Tindhara College-Ratnapark-Old Bus Park and ending at Bhadrakali. 29 March, 3:45PM-5PM. Parliamentarians are also invited.  
 ♦ **Nepali classical dance and folk music** at Hotel Vajra. Dances of Hindu and Buddhist gods Tuesdays and Fridays, 7PM onwards, the Great Pagoda Hall. Ticket and tea Rs 400. Nepali folk tunes Tuesdays and Saturdays, 6:30PM onwards. Hotel restaurant. Hotel Vajra. 271545  
 ♦ **Friends of Bagmati** Concerned individuals aiming to revive the waterways of Kathmandu Valley. For details email friends@thebagmatinepal@yahoo.com

**MUSIC**  
 ♦ **Sitar and Tabla Concert** 30 March, Saturday, 6:30PM by Steven Landsberg and Raveen Shrestha. Rs 250 with tea. Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Kamaladi, Ganeshthar, 221875.  
 ♦ **Sounds of Spring** Everything from rock, classical, jazz, funk, fusion, blues, Latin jazz, big band, R&B, Nepali folk, salsa, and contemporary Nepali music. Rs 1,500 per head including dinner. — March, Hotel Soaltee Crownie Plaza. 273999  
 ♦ **The Nuns Welfare Foundation of Nepal** Third annual evening of Tibetan chants and more with Ani Choying Doma, Manose on flute and others. 7 April, 6 PM. Patan Museum Café. Tickets Rs 600 at Dragonfly at Mike's Breakfast, and Patan Museum Café. For details email nwf@nyeping.com  
 ♦ **Live Jazz Music** An evening with Cadenza and Afro Dizzy Act at the newly opened stone paved Summit Hotel Courtyard. 29 March 6:30PM-10PM. The Summit Hotel. 521610

**DRINK**  
 ♦ **Saturday Live Buffet** with unlimited draft beer and live music by the Rusty Nails. The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel, 11:30AM-2:30PM. Saturdays. 411818  
 ♦ **The Best of Chai-Kebab** Celebrating 20 years of Chai-Kebab with all the bestsellers. 50 percent off FB&B during lunch. 20 percent off during dinner, two lucky tables only pay the price from 20 years ago. Until 4 April, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 221711  
 ♦ **Easter Specials** Chocolate bunnies, Easter eggs, cookies, cakes and souffles at La Patisserie, Soaltee Crownie Plaza. Until 31 March. 273999  
 ♦ **The new Roadhouse Café** Redesigned with separate bar seating and coffee bar. Original Mediterranean specialties, with wood-fired pizzas to return shortly. The Roadhouse Café, Bameel.  
 ♦ **Taste of Beijing** Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetable delicacies. Beijing Duck Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre. 468589  
 ♦ **Missed the Holi Sekuwa?** Regular Sekuwa begins next week, until then ceremonial Nepali cuisine at Krishnarjan Restaurant, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488  
 ♦ **Newari Bhoj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant. Lazimpat. 413874  
 ♦ **Charcoal** Buffet with grilled delicacies from around the world, glass of lager, live music and strawberries with cream. Non-vegetarians Rs 595 and vegetarians Rs 495, tax included. Poolside, Yak & Veil. 246959  
 ♦ **Barbecue lunch** with complementary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays at the Goddard Village Resort, Rs 650 per head plus tax. 560675

**GETAWAYS**  
 ♦ **Get ready for summer** Ayurvedic massage at Club Oasis, two massages free with every two. Finish with fresh juices, smoothies, flavoured yoghurt and fruit ice cream at the Terrace. Hotel Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234  
 ♦ **Bardiya's Best** Four nights and three days, jungle activities, transfers and meals including dikhri (steamed rice dumplings) with jungle sauces and spicy coriander chutney. \$120. Jungle Base Camp, Royal Bardiya National Park. 061-31681  
 ♦ **Escape** to the peace and harmony of Dwarika's Hotel. Several packages available. 479488

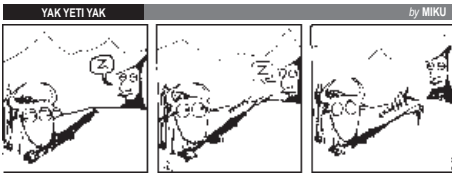
For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalnews.com

**NEPALI WEATHER** by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This spring is turning out to be wet, wet, wet. March is the second month in a row with above-normal rainfall in Kathmandu. Strong westerly fronts in late winter and early spring were responsible. And they aren't finished yet, another westerly band this way means hiding a jet stream from West Asia. This satellite picture was taken on Tuesday evening when a major weather cell that covered nearly the entire central Nepal from Kathmandu to Pokhara brought high winds, lightning and some rain. There is a low pressure area moving in leisurely fashion across north India, and this circulation will bring in bay of Bengal moisture which could result in more windy thunderstorms over the weekend. Expect temperatures to start picking up next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY				
Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
28-11	28-11	27-12	28-11	29-12

रविन्द्र सारनाथ



**BOOKWORM**  
 Tibetan Lives: Three Himalayan Autobiographies Peter Richardus, ed. Caron Press, London, 1998 Rs 5,310  
 In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, missionaries, scholars, traders and soldiers from China, Russia and Britain employed local staff to assist in their dealings with Tibetans, and these employees were in the vanguard of Tibet's encounter with the outside world. The autobiographies of three who served on the periphery of the imperial system—Phun-choepo Lang-rog, Karma-Sum-dhon Paul and Ts'in-chih Chen offer valuable ethnographic, sociological, and historical research data and provide valuable insights into this intermediary class.

**Manjusrimitra, Primalordial Experience: An Introduction to Dzog-chen Meditation** Nankhai Norbu and Kennard Lipman, trans. Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1983 Rs 1,460  
 The first English translation of one of Tibetan Buddhism's most revered texts, part of the Dzog-chen or Anu yoga tradition, the state of pure and total presence. Nankhai Norbu compares it with other systems through an examination of the notion of bodhicitta, and examines key philosophical questions about the relation of Anu yoga to Buddhist Idealism and the meditation practice linked with this text.

**The Way to Shambhala: A Search for the Mythical Kingdom Beyond the Himalayas** Edwin Bernbaum Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1980/2001 Rs 1,380  
 Drawing on Tibetan and Sanskrit texts, interviews with lamas in Nepal and India, and his own travels in the Himalaya, Bernbaum examines the legend of Shambhala, where a line of enlightened kings is said to guard the highest wisdom for when all spiritual values will be lost in time and destruction. He shows how the myth symbolises an inner, spiritual journey to enlightenment, inspired by the actual terrain of the Himalaya.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, mandalabook.com.np

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**This year's Sounds of Spring extravaganza promises new surprises.**

It began in 1998 with 1974AD launching their new album *Sanzhi Raschu* amongst a crowd that would otherwise never have had the chance to attend a 1974AD concert. Counted as one of the top rock bands in the country 1974AD couldn't have asked for a better beginning for their hit number *Sanzhi Raschu* from the same album. The following year, old timer Deep Shrestha made an extraordinary comeback performing old hits like *Kati Kamjore-Rachcha Bhagya*. It placed Deep Shrestha back on track with those who had written the veteran crossover off.  
 "Sounds of Spring is a milestone in Nepali music every year," says Soutale's Sunim Tamang. "It revives and brings forth old and new talents to a selective audience that understands and appreciates it."  
 In 2000 the young flutist Manose Singh along with the renowned classical vocalist Gaurav Karnat charmed the audience to quiet appreciation and then prolonged applause. By this time Sound of Spring had already become known as one of the leading acts of the year in

saying "Activities such as these will showcase Nepal's potential as a convention tourism, too, because it will prove that we are capable of managing international quality acts."  
 Performance this year will also be a mix of rock, classical, jazz, funk, fusion, blues, Latin jazz as well as contemporary Nepali music. Those scheduled to play include popular Nepali musicians the likes of Sandeep Pradhan, Deepak Bajracharya, Tsering Bhutia, Indra Man Singh and Rajen Gurung. While renowned guitarists Patrick Wilson and son Daniel will be performing Hotel California and Rosini Singh and Priscilla Lama will be doing cover versions by Alanis Morissette and Cranberries, Little Star will also be performing Joe Satriani piece. New introductions to the industry will be drummer Nikhil Tulahar and keyboardist Pabit Maharjan.  
 A quarter of the show will be dedicated to Nepali music and the rest a mix of tradition to modern rock, fusion, and Latin. But the thing to watch out for are the lights. "We will be using a total of 65,000 watts for the lighting system which will include intelligent and crazy lights. Kathmandu has not seen this before," says Little Star. Look out for the special effects accompanying Pink Floyd classic *Shine on you Crazy Diamond*.  
 Little Star (that is real name) has its international experience when arranged for concerts by ababa maestro Zakir Hussain, and British folk musician Donovan Leach. ♦  
 The on stage performance is also being on-ordained by Little Star, who will use "Our ultimate aim is to show that we are capable of putting up an international class act, provided we have the equipment for it. People have this general concept that nothing done in Nepal can be high quality. We are trying to prove this wrong and are preparing for this from all aspects," Sunim Tamang agrees.

**Sounds of Spring**

Live. Super Session • Dinner • Dance

Book, Sun, Fresh, Music, Live, Extra, Best, Sound, and International Nepali acts. Scheduled Spring 2002 will give you the best and unique show in a great deal of music artists performing live in the Magic Valley Hall on March 29, 2002 (Saturday).

Tickets available at our Lobbys Desk. Book by 19:00 on the previous Saturday. Live, News, Shows, Welcome Drink and Dessert.

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Under My Hat

by Kundia Dixit

# Happy Holi Week

As we go into another week of celebrating our prehistoric festivals and rituals with wild abandon, it is important to bear in mind the importance of conserving Nepal's cultural health, wealth and happiness. Yes, many of our age-old customs are in danger of being dragged into the limbo of forgotten things right before our wide-eyes in broad daylight. Pretty soon, the only customs we have left will be the one at Tribhuvan International Airport.

Look, for instance, at our national past-time of partaking of a noon nap at Tundikhel. There used to be a time when Tundikhel was so jam-packed with our snoozing ancestors that it was standing room only. Latecomers had to move to Sano Tundikhel, and even that got pretty full up on some lazy winter afternoons. But today, you'd be lucky if you saw even one person dozing there. The relentless march of time, the modern consumer culture, a creeping materialism and the rat race of our stressful lifestyle have all contributed to making this glorious practice extinct, and the nation is a whole lot poorer for it. No more can we render ourselves unconscious during daylight hours and forget the mundane cares and travails of our rugged passage through world history.

But all is not lost. Lately, we have started seeing some conservation-minded people who value our priceless heritage (but unlike many of us, have decided to do something about it) trying to revive this grand tradition

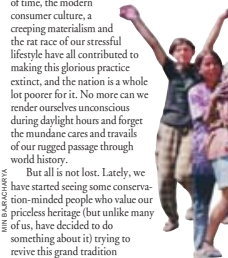
of national siesta. They have been caught napping at their desks at the Ministry of Rest and Recreation. The public has been requested not to create any street disturbances in the coming week, which may wake these sedated bureau cats up from deep slumber. Shhh.

On this Holi Week, we must also take a solemn oath to resuscitate another fun-filled festival which is also in danger of going the way of the woolly mammoth. We cannot bear the thought of not being able to be stoned out of our minds and lob lids at damsels on the sidewalks, and see them totally soaked from head to toe in Bagmati water.

Hahahahahaha! (Blood-curdling laughter.) So fun. If, god forbid, Holi disappears we will no longer be able to dab war paint on our faces and prowl neighbourhood streets ambushing innocent passersby and rubbing cadmium-rich red vermilion powder into their eye sockets. Harharhar-de-harhar! (Boisterous chorle and guffaw.) So laughable, yar.

However, it is my sad duty to bring to my mindful readers' notice that these fun and games, these magnificent customs may soon be a thing of the past.

They are now under threat from an administration notification that miscreants creating a nuisance will be nabbed on the spot on a strict first-come-first-serve basis so that no untoward incident takes place. Afters all extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures, and we cannot sit idly by while this country goes down the pickhari rube. ♦



संपूर्ण कयाँ सानरिक्त स्याम्पु

रेहाम जस्तो बलियो

कपाल बलाउन

कालासुपान सुमुन्दरात

कालासुपान सुमुन्दरात

# Renu gets to work

Renu Rajbhandari was a medical officer at Teku Hospital ten years ago. AIDS was just beginning to show itself in Nepal, and health professionals employed at the central health laboratory would get excited whenever they came across a new case. "At that time we were just interested in numbers," Renu recalls.

All that was soon to change. HIV spread dramatically, and is now poised to become the biggest killer of young Nepalis. And for Renu, there was the shocking realisation that behind the statistics were searing personal tragedies. Ten years ago, the young doctor went on a field visit to Nuwakot and came face-to-face with the disease. "She was a 19-year-old dalit girl who had been sold by her uncle to a Bombay brothel when she was 12. She managed to escape after six years, but not after being infected."

The visit jolted Rajbhandari out of her comfortable existence because the girl accused her of selling her blood. Renu remembers thinking, "Here I am an educated doctor, society had invested in me. But I felt useless. I am giving nothing back to society." Renu was haunted by the torture, mental and physical suffering the girl in Nagarkot had been through in her young life.

Two months passed in a fit of depression and introspection, when Renu's husband encouraged her to do something about the problem. She was determined to change the focus of her work. She took off to Nuwakot, where she spent two months visiting the village of Ghyangghedi collecting as much information as she could about trafficking. "I had no idea about the issue. I had no organisation, no funding, I was just driven by emotion."

Today, the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) which Renu set up in 1991 is among many groups in Nepal addressing women's health as a human right. Gender discrimination in Nepal society is taking its toll on women's health, and is at the root of evils like trafficking. Asked about the recently passed Women's Bill, Renu feels it is still going for welfare, whereas Nepal women need their basic human rights ensured and laws implemented properly. "The patriarchal notion of the state is strongly evident in the bill, and

also in the domestic violence bill presently being discussed," she says, and is doubtful they will change the status of Nepali women. Renu thinks the newly-formed Women's Commission is a positive step, but is overtly politicised and doesn't have teeth.

But Renu has managed to sink her own teeth into the problem with WOREC's work in 11 districts around the country. Some 200,000 women in Udaypur, Siraha, Morang, Sindhupalchok, Mustang benefit from the organisation's work. The Maoist insurgency has affected activities in some districts, but WOREC's women-centred health programmes continue in others. Barefoot gynaecologists teach women about their bodies, how to take care of themselves, about nutrition.

The group runs community mediation centres where trained paralegals look into cases ignored by the police as well as shelters for trafficked women in the border town of Janakpur. Renu practices what she preaches: she is avoiding the welfare approach, trying to get cooperatives of women to do things themselves. ♦



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