

15

The Aussies are back

8-C



Maoists are now targeting infrastructure. Is this desperation, or is the conflict entering a new phase?



The \$ 20 million Jhimruk hydroelectric plant which was put out of action by Maoist attacks on 30-31 March.

entrepreneurial skills and income generating activities.

"We have estimates but no formal assessment of damage," says Bimal Koirala, Finance Secretary. "A team will be going to Jhimruk to do a proper assessment next week. This may in fact be the first specific assessment of Maoist damage so far, and it has been necessitated because of the on-going effort to privatise Butwal Power Company which owns the project.

The army contingent at Chernat:

Editorial p.
Fear and Loathing

Locally hired guards were no match for the rebels, who rounded up all 300 employees and held them hostage while they razed the power station. "We don't have a complete picture of the damages yet because we have not been able to go there," Kiran Malla, general manager of BPC told us on Wednesday.

Go to  p

KASH JWALA



Countdown to Year Zero

On 8 March, Bhagawati Gautam of Shoba village in Rukum was heading to Khalanga for a Women's Day rally. She stepped on an anti-personnel mine near the military camp in Saankh and lost her right leg (see picture). The security forces and the Maoists are both using landmines in this increasingly costly war. This is

worrying because of the danger to civilians and the long-term impact landmines have on populations long after the conflict is over.

In districts like Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Jajarkot and Kalikot the sound of bombs going off and gunfire are so commonplace, people take little notice. Ordinary people are trapped between the government's *sannakal* (emergency) and the Maoists' *mahakal* (showdown). Walking across these districts, there are checkpoints everywhere: army sentries and Maoist sentries. Many district level politicians are immobilised. Almost every VDC building in Rukum has been demolished. Most local politicians have sought refuge in Musikot, or further afield. Those who dared stay back are harassed.

Bane Kami, the VDC chairman of Maikot was held captive for five months, and the Maoists tried to bury him alive. They raided the house of Pashupati Thapa, VDC chair of Gotamkot, looted Rs 800,000 worth of property and are still holding him captive. They abducted and tortured Karna Bahadur Gurung, Kewal Sharma, and Devlal Khadka. The Maoists are preventing students travelling to the district headquarters to take their SLC exams.

The security forces are based in the headquarters ringed by barbed wire and minefields, and the Maoists rule the countryside. There is an undeclared curfew

after 6 pm. Rukum's CDO went on a five-day leave, and arranged his own transfer. There has been no CDO here for months. Flights to Chaurjhari have stopped after the Maoists destroyed the airport tower two months ago. Everyone expects the next attack at Musikot's Salle airfield, the last remaining lifeline to the outside world.

The Maoists are now on a rampage: destroying bridges, stopping highway construction. The government is controlling transport of food and medicine into the hinterland of Karnali, Bheri and Rapti zones so it does not get into rebel hands. And the Maoists are looting whatever provisions villagers still have left. The locals are running out of food, and there is a real danger of starvation. Farmers are not growing food because they have to pay a cut to the Maoists even for the vegetables they grow.

The Maoists are now picking on the weak and helpless. Those with money and connections are no longer in the district or have bought their safety by giving the Maoists food, donations and shelter. Those who remain now have little choice but to run away, leave everything and head to India in search of work.

Some who survived Maoist excesses have been caught in the security forces dragnet. Many civilians have been killed and wounded in army action. Kotwara in Kalikot has seen casualties: construction workers at an airfield, political cadre of the Nepali Congress and UML shot because they were mistaken for Maoists. Villagers in Rolpa going to the forests to collect firewood were wounded during helicopter attacks.

(Prakash Jwala is the UML MP from Sallyan, and visited Rukum 23-24 March.)

EXCLUSIVE

SLRs at SLC

More than 250,000 students all over Nepal are sitting for SLC exams this month under unprecedented security. Children were frisked, sniffer dogs went through classrooms, and troops stood guard outside schools like this one in Kathmandu (*below*). But uncertainty over the bandh meant that the exams were



still disrupted in some of the 683 centres, which were reduced from the normal 833. In Maoist areas, rebels prevented children from travelling for tests. Despite the bandh being called off, long-distance buses kept off the roads and business in the tarai was disrupted all week. Is it lingering fear of Maoist retaliation, or is this an anti-bandh bandh?

Dr Gurung's Nepal

Consolidating the country's 75 districts into 25 is the only way to make them economically viable and more governable, argues Harka Gurung. (see p3)

RA to restart Dubai

Royal Nepal Airlines is dumping its loss-making Bangalore flights, launched with much fanfare last year, to resume flying to Dubai. The ailing airline is under pressure to increase revenue, and a top official told us flights to the Emirates will have better load factors. Meanwhile, the airline's international flights, badly disrupted last week by the grounding of one of its 757s in Bangkok, is now back to normal.

COMMENT

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 28
Q. Should the government accept the Maoist offer to resume talks?

Response	Percentage
Yes	48.6%
No	51.4%

Don't know 2.2%

No 49.2%

Total votes: 136

Weekly Internet Poll # 29: To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com
Q. Do you believe the Nepali media's reporting of the Maoist insurgency?



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Amit Jung Thapa
Sydney

Seeing tomorrow

Many Nepalis suffer from trachoma, an eye infection that leads to blindness. Now there is hope of better vision for tomorrow.

RAMYATA LIMBU

A infection so serious it can lead to blindness, and a remedy so simple that all it takes is a habit of washing the face and some pills. Such is the paradox of medical problems in developing countries.

One such infection is trachoma which is endemic in western Nepal, where it afflicts nearly one in every ten people, and it is the leading cause of preventable blindness in the country. But a new prevention and cure campaign launched by a Nepali NGO which will distribute antibiotics donated by the US pharmaceutical company, Pfizer, is expected to eradicate trachoma in the next two decades.

In two weeks, the Nepal Netra Yoni Sangh (National Society for Comprehensive Eye Care - NNJS) will administer Zithromax pills to patients in Kailali, Kanchanpur, Nawalparasi and Chitwan districts. The antibiotic is the key component of a national strategy to eliminate trachoma. It is part of a strategy called SAFE - Surgery, Antibiotic, Facial Cleanliness and Environmental Improvement. "With SAFE, we hope to eliminate trachoma as a blinding disease by the year 2020," says Bimal Poudyal of NNJS.

Trachoma is a type of chronic conjunctivitis caused by a micro organism which leads to acute

inflammation and scarring of the inner lining of the eye. In extreme cases, the eyelashes turn inward, rubbing on the cornea and causing blindness by turning the lens opaque. The key to treatment is Zithromax which can control infection by bacteria in the tissue of the eyelids. But, explains eye specialist NNJS chairman, Ram Prasad Pokhrel: "It has to be accompanied by a widespread awareness campaign about personal hygiene and a clean environment."

Trachoma, known locally as *kharsa*, is prevalent in 6.9 percent of the population and in the far-western regions of Nepal. The 1981 National Blindness Survey showed that trachoma was endemic in Banke, Bardia, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Dang, and Surkhet and largely prevalent among the Tharu, Magar, and Thakuri communities. Pockets also exist in hilly and mountain regions like Jajarkot with its poor personal hygiene and lack of community sanitation.

Cataract blindness strikes both the rich and the poor - and most people seek a cure once they lose their sight. But trachoma, a disease of poverty, is common in areas deprived of basic needs in housing, health, water and sanitation, and debilitates families and communities.

Studies show that Tharu communities are three times more

likely to contract the disease. Likewise, women who are in close contact with children are more likely to suffer from trachoma blindness because infants and young children are reservoirs of the disease, primarily because they do not wash their faces.

The highly contagious bacteria that spreads trachoma is most active during the hot months, so NNJS and its network of collaborating community groups have their work cut out for them this summer. "We have to get the antibiotics into the field for this cycle if we want to meet national targets," says Diwas Rijal, NNJS Program Director. That target is part of the National Plan of Action for Eye Care Services in Nepal prepared last September. The Global Initiative for the Prevention of Avoidable Blindness (called 'Vision 2020: The Right to Sight') set the objective of reducing trachoma in Nepal by 30 percent by 2004, 50 percent by 2009, 80 percent by 2014 and

complete eradication by 2019. Effort of NNJS and its collaborating partners have already seen some success. Mobile surgery camps, eye hospital treatment centres and community trachoma control programmes in high-prevalence areas like Banke and Bardia have brought about a drop in the disease. "With education, awareness and medication, the situation has improved in areas like Bardia, where prevalence has dropped from 30 to five percent," says Shail Shrestha, the Swiss Red Cross Representative in Kathmandu. A community-based trachoma control programme run since 1989 by the Nepal Red Cross in collaboration with the Swiss Red Cross and NNJS has mobilised local volunteers to promote awareness about trachoma infections and relatively simple cleanliness and hygiene prevention measures. Makuni Tharu is one of 200 active eye care Red Cross volunteers in Bardia. She with 15 other volunteers has received a bicycle for referring 50 cases for surgery to the Fateh Bal Eye Hospital in Nepalgunj, and with it she is now able to reach a wider community.

by DANIEL LAK

Not cricket, old boy

The sport is a sport like any other, not a metaphor for life.

and with illegal substances on a beach in Barbados. On both occasions, and many times in between, I fell foul of the British sporting media by laughing at the stories in question and adopting the attitude "well, they would, wouldn't they." Yes we reporters tend to regard most things with cynicism, a sense that nothing is as it seems and the public face being put on events is not to be trusted. For an explanation of most things, look to human nature, greed, lust, an overestimate of one's own competence.

That's certainly how I interpreted the tale of poor Cronje, South Africa's cricket captain, caught by the Delhi police with a pocket full of bookmakers' money. He was, it seems, offering advice on pitch conditions and such—at ten thousand dollars a pop. Not bad for a weather report. To me, he was obeying one of my natural laws, giving way to greed, sating away filthy lucre for that not too distant day when his crickering skills no longer carried him big bucks. Wrong, perhaps, but in the pantheon of human sins, venial, not violent, not turning anyone's jaw perhaps the poor sucker who bet with unfornamed bookies.

But the British (and South Asian) sporting press saw things differently. Words like "tragedy," "outrage" and "criminal" popped up regularly. The phrases were even overthrown. "A stain on the face of the sport," according to one BBC commentator, "a body blow to cricket," said a writer on the game. Excuse me? What are we talking about here? An international enterprise that earns vast sums of money for a panoply of people, not least bookmakers, or a pristine, pure pastime of gentlemen on a village green in Victorian England. Respectfully, I say the former. Sport is big business, among the biggest. Content, entertainment, closely linked with the marketing of lucrative and luxurious consumer items, and its players deserve to get what chunk of action that they can. If, like Hansie Cronje and all sorts of others, they cross a legal line and are caught, they must be punished. But they must not be vilified by Taleban-esque supporters

and media types, people who've deceived themselves into thinking professional cricket is a religion and not a big business masquerading as a sport.

So too with the *Himal* analysis of cricket's casteism, its uniquely South Asian twisting of British imperial identity in the selection process, its subtle symbolism in support of the status quo, its ability to seem more than the venal enterprise I'm talking about here. The article was a good read. It made certain points, and we should all favour the deconstruction of anything we hold dear, if only to strengthen it, make it more sustainable. But no, keep your hands off cricket, it's doing rather nicely without grubby journalists prying around and getting ink stains all over bat, ball and those nifty pullovers worn on even the hottest days.

I'm no great fan of any other sport, although I have a soft spot for football—dead simple, a great fiddle, a platform for the poor to shine in many countries. But also a pursuit that drips money from its seams, that tempts wrongdoing and match fixing and the misuse of fame by simple souls exploited by the bookies, agents and other profiteers. So too America's sports of baseball, basketball etc. But Americans—at least—see their sporting heroes as professional athletes, not angels or guardians of tradition.

Cricket needs to loosen up, to drop the holier than thou attitude, to accept that it's part of the entertainment business, and not a metaphor for life. Control match fixing if you can, but don't put Hansie Cronje or anyone else who defies your perceptions of the game in a pit with Jack the Ripper. Besides, a sport that expects the role of legal money, marketing and profit-maximisation might just be more egalitarian and even successful. As we saw in *Lagan*, no caste, class or ethnic group has the market cornered on hitting sixes, fast bowling or sharp fielding. Howzat? ♦



A trachoma awareness camp in progress in Bardia.

51485 NKS PHOTOGRAPHY

Nepal is the first country in South Asia to prepare a National Plan of Action which combines the forces of government agencies and non-governmental organisations working in eye care, and sets up trachoma centres to be established at eye hospitals located in endemic zones. While projects underway so far have had a positive impact, officials acknowledge that greater action is required. "What's extremely urgent is a large scale awareness program aimed at changing behaviour," says Poudyal.

To raise public awareness about trachoma, the BRC World Service Trust, working in partnership with Radio Nepal, NNJS, and the Ministry of Health, launched an innovative media campaign in late March to disseminate information about the disease. Comprised of music and radio spots and posters, the campaign focuses on face and eye washing and a clean environment—two key behaviour changes that can reduce trachoma prevalence. In addition to Nepal, languages being produced in Tharu.

"Our campaign's aim is to familiarise the population with the word trachoma," says Madhu Acharya, a radio producer with the BBC Trust. "They must make the link between trachoma and blindness, inform people that it can be prevented by simply washing one's face well and by maintaining a clean environment free of flies."

Trachoma is endemic in 49 countries, primarily in Africa the eastern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia and the western Pacific. It remains the most common preventable cause of blindness in the world with an estimated 5.6 million blind, visually impaired or at immediate risk of blindness from the disease and another 146 million cases of active trachoma in need of treatment. ♦

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CIAA stats

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is making moves. In the past 18 months the CIAA has charged more than Rs. 210 million as fines for irregularities by public office holders. It has investigated and filed cases against 87 individuals at the Patan Appellate Court. Out of the 72 cases heard at the court, 36 cases were decided in favour of the commission while a dozen were annulled. In the same period CIAA investigated 442 academic certificates and found 69 to be fake. It has filed cases of misrepresentation of academic qualifications against 28 employees, of which 13 are government employees and 15 are from different public corporation employees who has used fake certificates for securing recruitment and promotion.

Adventure Nepal

As the world of adventure travel asserts itself as a Feature Product during the 25th PATA Travel Mart in Singapore, 9-12 April, Nepal will be in the spotlight as the Feature Country. Plagued by an insurgency, an emergency, and recession, it might be the much-needed boost Nepal's flagging tourism needs. For some years, adventure travel has become the most dynamic and fast-growing sector of international tourism with adventure related activities accounting for as much as 20 percent of the revenue turnover of the tourism industry. "Adventure travel remains an aspect of the industry that is dominated by small operators with limited budgets," says Action Asia magazine Publisher and Editor-in-Chief Robert Houston. "Being Feature Product at PATA Travel Mart will encourage operators to lift their standards and offer a greater variety of new and interesting packages." Are Nepal operators listening?

Kapil visits Govinda

Member of National Commission on Human Rights, Kapil Shrestha, says the case of Govinda Mainali who is serving a life sentence in a Japanese jail for allegedly killing a Japanese woman in 1987 is a "blot" on the cordial relations between Japan and Nepal. Shrestha was addressing a press conference in Tokyo last week organised by the activist group "Justice for Govinda". He had earlier visited Govinda in a Tokyo detention centre, and said he found him to be "reasonably good spirits". Some 80 people, including three lawyers defending Govinda and Japanese-Nepali Rajan Pradhanang, participated in the talk programme at the Catholic Centre in Tokyo.

Lawyers defending Govinda also took part, saying that the way the appellate court decided in 2000 to "criss-cross his serious investigation or carefully analysing discrepancies in the police investigation" raised some serious questions on the impartiality, fairness and efficacy of the process.

Bangkok Times

The Burmugrad Hospital in Thailand, has become the first hospital in the world to offer its patients and visitors the latest international edition of their hometown papers. That has been possible with the installation of an interactive newspaper kiosk on its premises. The PRESSPOINT™, PEPC's self-contained interactive kiosk, currently prints the latest editions of 69 national and international newspapers from 37 countries - including the Nepali Times published from Kathmandu. Asia's only internationally accredited hospital, Burmugrad accommodates over 750,000 patients a year of which over 215,000 patients are from outside Thailand. "We are excited that we can now offer our patients and visitors the latest edition of their favourite newspaper in their native language while staying at our hospital," says Curtis J. Schroeder, Burmugrad's American CEO. "Bringing our patients a daily touch of home will surely make their stay more pleasant." That includes Nepali patients.



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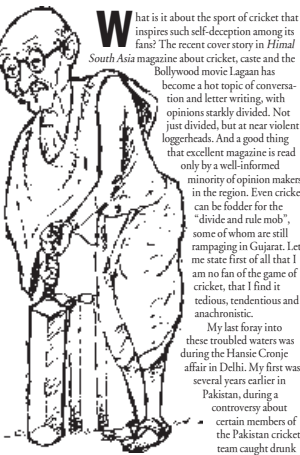
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hostile territory

We are turning into a nation of cynical, frustrated misanthropes.

knows how expensive a career in public service has become. The people can't figure out how their leaders can be so insensitive to their concerns and still have the impudence to come knocking at election time. The security forces complain how the people's representatives' reluctance to camp in their constituencies is undercutting the campaign to draw rebels away from their guns. The insurgents can't understand why the country is losing sight of their ultimate cause just because the armed wing of the party happens to have gained a pre-eminence over the political commissars now. Bureaucrats don't know how many masters they are expected to serve. Civil society worries about how fast courtesy is disappearing from the national discourse.

Nattering nabobs of negativism have pushed the nation to new depths of despair. We've spent the last 12 years squabbling over the source of our sickness and reaching out for a remedy within our rifts. Those in power have prospered by pointing to the perennial infamy of Nepali democracy. Remnants of the ancient regime take satisfaction in the endless stumbles the new political elite have made of a habit of taking.

Those in the saddlelines have been forced to witness a spectacle they clearly didn't expect and certainly don't like. Sure, things could have been a whole lot better. Singapore was too ambitious a goal our inexperienced leaders tried to impress us with. But, remember, we did start out with more opposition MPs than denizens of Lee Kwan Yew's city-state could ever dream of. Talk of the sun rising from the west was an insidious symptom of the compulsions of our hung parliament. But we could have tried to complete the Mahakali detailed project report before that part of Uttar Pradesh turned into Uttaranchal. The ruling party has consistently failed to act on its pledge to provide a stable government. But our eternally bickering Kangresis could have ensured that the opposition did not end up having the final word on who the prime minister should be.

It probably doesn't hurt to hit rock bottom once in a while to refresh on missed opportunities and to reach out to our possibilities. One time-tested therapy for dependency is to think of how much worse things could have been. (Exercise No. 1: Make a list of three things we might have been

worrying about today if we didn't have a Maoist insurgency, endless corruption allegations or sickening power plays.)

Does this approach smack of escapism? Not when there aren't too many refugees around. Is it fatalism? Our life is too heavily influenced by predestination for another few twists of fate to make much of a difference. Do I have a roadmap for renewal after all this carping? No. Especially not when those who are paid to prepare one have hardly paid to try their drawing boards. But I'm not even a mean about to give up my right to rant.

But here's my two paises anyway. Since we have to make the best with what we have, we must confront our quest for freedom and dignity with brutal candour. Perhaps a good place to start would be the rapidly diminishing space between nostalgia for the predictability of the partyless decades and the promise of a one-party paradise.

Discussions on panchayat atrocities would serve little purpose anymore without acknowledging that opponents of the status quo used murder and sabotage as political weapons long before the Maoists rose up against the state. How Kangresis hijackers and commu-

nist head-hunters pitted against the putrid panchas in the 1970s eventually recognised the need to build a common platform two decades later is crucial to understanding the undercurrents of our political flow.

To be sure, this catharsis will reopen old wounds. People whom we've spent a lifetime defying may come down crashing from their pedestals in no time. In the wisdom time so graciously bestows on us, some sullied personalities may succeed in redeeming part of their reputation. In any case, we have to stop playing this blame game if we want to avoid becoming a nation of misanthropes. The deconstruction of the myth that a few have a monopoly on political virtue would eventually have a therapeutic effect on the nation's conscience. (Exercise No.2: Let's try to find out if we have the compassion to absolve each other—and ourselves—of crimes we may not have committed.)

You know what? Maybe we should set up a truth and reconciliation commission where we can sob, wail, moan and bang our fists for as long as we feel like. Once we run out of grudges, we might just start liking each other. ♦



by KANAK MANI DIXIT

Why do Nepali commentators not feel the need to express their opinion on the Palestinian intifada, Govinda Mainali in a Japanese jail, or the Uttar Pradesh elections?

ask why the Dalai Lama cannot visit the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautam. When it comes to India, the pandits mouth the identical 'nationalist' views heard from the political party pundits. You would be hard-pressed to locate an India-watcher in Nepali academe, even though our economy and polity is dominated by the southern neighbour. Do not expect the Kathmandu analyst to write on the results of the recent Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, or the possible impact of Ayodhya violence on the Nepal rally.

We are fixated on New Delhi as a supposed equal, but do little to challenge the so-called Nepal-experts in New Delhi, mostly self-important academics who do not keep up-to-date with the country's wildly changing political landscape. Nepali academics profess to love these talking heads, but then they do precious little to make themselves heard by the Indian opinion-making classes. When was the last time a Nepali professor published in a New Delhi weekly or daily?

The homework is just not there. For decades, the opinion-makers roared on the need to rescind or renegotiate the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India. But the moment the Indian government (under I.K. Gurjar) agreed to discuss the treaty, all our resolve disappeared and we ran for cover. After all, it is unclear whether we would indeed benefit—under present conditions of underdevelopment—if the equal treatment clause and the open

border were to be tampered with. ("Okay, tell me what you want to do with it," Gurjar asked the *digvijay* gathered at the Nepal Council of World Affairs, when challenged on the treaty. He was greeted with pin drop silence.)

On geo-political discourse, we are still at the stage of valourising Nalpani, claiming that Lumbini is ours (even though no one is really taking it away from us), taking pride in being the land of Buddha (even though peace is here no more), and pointing to Mount Everest as our own (forgetting, conveniently, that it is owned by Tibet/China). Inconvenient facts, we prefer to push under the mind's carpet, such as Nepal being the one country in SAARC that allows its citizens to fight in another member country's army against a third member country.

If there is so little being said on Nepal-India relations, there are even fewer grey cells being exercised on how we may have the right to uphold the Israeli government for its ongoing inhumanity against the Palestinians, and the incredible television footage of Yasser Arafat's person under siege. But do not hold your breath. The Nepali intelligentsia has not developed an anti-nuclear proliferation agenda even though we would be the first to be irradiated by even a limited nuclear exchange between Islamabad and New Delhi. To move on to Bhutan, there is no would indeed benefit—under present conditions of underdevelopment—if the equal treatment clause and the open

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If there is so little being said on Nepal-India relations, there are even fewer grey cells being exercised on how we may have the right to uphold the Israeli government for its ongoing inhumanity against the Palestinians, and the incredible television footage of Yasser Arafat's person under siege. But do not hold your breath. The Nepali intelligentsia has not developed an anti-nuclear proliferation agenda even though we would be the first to be irradiated by even a limited nuclear exchange between Islamabad and New Delhi. To move on to Bhutan, there is no would indeed benefit—under present conditions of underdevelopment—if the equal treatment clause and the open

High-flying fees

Airline tickets could cost more pretty soon. The government on 29 March revised several fees relating to the sector, which airlines will doubtless need to pass on to the consumer. The decision raises the registration, renewal and ownership fees for airlines and also reduces fees relating to Air Operating Certificates (AOC). Registration fees for aircraft (including helicopters) up to 7,500 kg flight weight is Rs 22,950 (\$300), almost double the existing rate, that for gliders is Rs 7,600, up from Rs 4,000. The AOC fee for international flights, which was based on flight type, has been fixed at Rs 95,500 (\$12,500), a significant reduction from the Rs 500,000 payable earlier for charters it was Rs 300,000. However—as if to balance the revenue losses—the government has raised the AOC fees for domestic operators to Rs 382,500 up from Rs 100,000 (and Rs 60,000 for irregular operators). The domestic industry, which was declared as 'sick' some weeks ago and allowed to raise fares is perplexed, because the decision was taken without consulting the industry.

Bidding for tea

The Nepal Tea and Coffee Development Board (NTCDB) has begun auctioning tea in Birtamod, the first organised effort to market domestic tea produce. Six producers participated in the auction on 27 March though the sale was not very brisk as the bidders were largely Nepali companies. Nepali tea producers say they produce some of the best quality teas in the world but have not been able to sell because of the lack of marketing arrangements. Nepali orthodox tea, produced in the hills of Nepal, is said to be of better quality than Indian teas, largely because the plants are young and grow using relatively smaller quantities of pesticides and chemical fertilisers. Nepal produced 6.6 million kg of tea in fiscal 2000/01, up from the roughly 5 million kg produced the year before.

More ADB loans

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) says it is willing to give Nepal up to \$300 million in loans between 2003-2005 to support 13 proposed projects. However, Nepal will see the money only if it is able to perform in accordance with criteria set to assess its macroeconomic performance, policy reforms in different sectors and ability to use the money. By ADB standards Nepal's performance is a 'base case', which makes it eligible to borrow between \$90-100 million annually from the bank's concessional lending window, the Asian Development Fund. The bank has also said yes to about 24 non-loan grants as technical assistance, which will add up to about \$4 million each year. Sector-wise, there are to be six loans in agriculture and natural resources, two in finance and industry, three in social infrastructure, one in energy and one in transport and communications.

Cheaper, greener flooring

Here's a choice for less expensive and possibly more environment-friendly flooring. The Himalayan Bamboo P.L. Ltd. has begun marketing its bamboo-flooring product as an alternative to wood panel, marble etc. The flooring resembles wood but retains the texture and colours of bamboo. Company sources add that its anti-mold, anti-mildew, waterproof, heat resistant and deformity proof.



INTERVIEW

We are investors in this country, make it easier to invest.

Thai has always been a strong competitor. We also have Qatar, Transavia, Gulf Air.

Does Singapore Airlines promote Nepal, how?
If you recall, about a year-and-a-half ago we did a USA-Nepal tour where we flew travel trade industry people to nine US cities. We did that twice to make sure the Americans were coming. If nothing else, with such trips we can assure their concerns of what's about coming to Nepal. It is good to tell people there about the situation first hand and invite them to visit. You have to have a presence in markets, otherwise it is easy for people with money to go elsewhere. We are doing other things. For example, during the jazz festival, we brought over Don Burrows, and band. We have had other things. These things are needed to pacify people, make them think Kathmandu is quite safe. We hope the word gets around. We distributed code to over 100 posters on the festival in the US, Australia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan... almost all over the world.

You seem to be doing what Royal Nepal should be doing
Given their constraints, it is quite difficult for them. They have been closing their stations one by one. Somebody has to fill their shoes, do their bit for the sake of tourism.

What can Royal Nepal learn from Singapore Airlines?
If I were at Royal Nepal I would concentrate only on routes that are making money. It is time to put aside your national pride and focus on the business. Let's make the profitable routes work first and then as you get more confidence and revenue, you can expand to other routes. Some destinations that Royal Nepal flies to are a little suspicious, why would anybody want to fly to stations that are like white elephants. Last year we cut off two stations because they were not making money. It has to be run like a business.

How has the in-bound traffic of Nepalis to Singapore been? Why should Nepalis go there?
Singapore is a very convenient place for Nepalis. You don't need visas, everybody in Singapore speaks English. All you need to go there is a return ticket and you can spend a few days there. There is a fairly large Nepali community there. Singapore is safe, almost crime free.

Do you also have a new package?
The package is for all travellers visiting Singapore. We realise tourism is

our major revenue earner, like for Nepal. Hence the package, which gives you a night in Singapore for \$32. It is an extremely good deal, but you need a ticket from Singapore Airlines. That is part of the deal because it is subsidised by the airline, the Singapore Tourism Board and the concerned hotels.

You used to fly Airbus 340s to Kathmandu on occasion, now you are using A317s. Do you plan to increase frequency or go back to A340s?
We intend to increase frequency, we've been doing that in the winter, when demand outstrips supply. That's when we bring in A340s. Later, we've stopped, because the bigger aircraft are required for long hauls. If the loads justify it, we will go back to them.

There are pricing issues. It is cheaper to fly to Singapore from New Delhi than from Kathmandu, why?
I guess it is a marketing strategy. There are more airlines flying from New Delhi to Singapore than from Kathmandu and vice-versa. Also there are more passengers there.

Have you also had an increase in Indian tourists?
There was an increase but everything slowed down after 11 September. We are now focusing on the tourist areas like China. Japan has also slowed down, but there are signs that the traffic is picking up again.

Are you happy about the money you pay for the services you get here?
Nepal is not a cheap place to operate to, taxes are quite high and you are taxed on the gross revenue, not the net. For example, we sell a ticket and give a certain percentage as commission to agents, but the government chooses to tax on the gross. It is a double whammy for us, we have to give commissions and also pay from the gross. These are areas that I hope the government will look into. The government is less expensive to people who want to invest in this country. Simple things like airport passes also make a difference. Now they tell me that because I work in the town office I cannot get a pass. Things like these make it very challenging. There is no facilitation committee or anything like that to take care of important but small things. We are investors in this country, make it easier for us to invest. Parking landing charges are one thing, they just raised the rental for airport offices by 100 percent, without prior consultation. They should have at least checked. That is not a way to do business.



The telecommunications tower was blown up by Maoists on 29 March, now the tourist town of Saubha is without phones.

Narayan Nagar Palika in Dalkh and Okhaldhunga's water supply? The attacks after 20 March appear to have been part of the terror campaign in the build-up for the strike the Maoists had proposed for 2-6 April. Maoists caught trying to plant bombs in Kathmandu in the past week reportedly admitted just that. Then there are all the other losses. The counter-insurgency operation has already cost the government Rs 1 billion since November. The crippling losses caused by the collapse of the tourism industry and manufacturing and its knock-on effect on the economy cannot even be estimated. Add to that the cost of destroyed infrastructure and it shows that the Maoists are not just fighting an insurgency, they are systematically dismantling a nation.

By now, the rebels have dropped all pretences of trying to be popular or not attacking projects that benefited the poor. Now, anyone is a fair game, and there is a frightening element of looting and plunder that accompanies the attacks. It could be that the Maoists are responding to military pressure on their activities, and have turned to soft targets to spread maximum panic. Could it, then, be a sign of desperation? Explains Gautam: "The desperation does not explain the mindless violence. The leadership has no reason to be desperate since the leadership is safe in India and is confident the revolution is on course." ♦

PHOTO BY PUSKAR BHUSAL

They ran up another mountain, and what do you think they saw?

Take a normal marathon, multiply it by nine days. And add the highest mountains in the world. You have the Annual Annapurna Mandela Marathon.



PADAM GHALEY

It's not called the "mother of all marathons" just for fun. Along with the shorter Everest Marathon, this is one of the most gruelling races on earth, and is recommended only for the most physically fit, endurance-tested and acclimatised of athletes. Normal marathons are 42.5 km runs through flat city streets. Now take that race, multiply it by nine days and add vertical segments. And you have the

Annapurna Mandela Marathon. The race is organised every year by the Himalayan Races Association in France in collaboration with Mandala Treks in Kathmandu. This year's just-concluded third annual race had 31 participants of which nine were Nepalis, one runner from Greece, one British, one German, and the rest from France.

The race starts at the road-head in Besi Sahar, and follows the Marsyangdi River up to Manang, over the Thorung La to Muktimath,



Jomsom and down the Kali Gandaki, up again to Ghorepani and down to Dhapu near Pokhara. It is a horizontal distance of 325 km, but add the ups and downs and you have a marathon designed by a masochist to inflict maximum punishment on a runner. The Annapurna marathon has everything: altitude variation, stupendous scenery (although runners don't have time to sit around and admire the view), and a geographic diversity of going from

the steep southern slopes of the Himalayas to the arid rainshadow of the Himalayan Manang and Mustang. Besi Sahar is at the bottom of the semi-tropical valley at barely 800 m above sea level, and Thorung La is at 5,416 m.

Competition had a day to acclimatise in Manang, and this year's side-run to Tilicho lake was also added before the runner made a dash for the pass over the hump. Unlike the Everest Marathon, which is shorter, the Annapurna run is a circuit and doesn't go through the same area twice. The race also passes some of the big names in Himalayan peaks: the Annapurnas, Himalchuli-Manaslu and Dhaulagiri.

Says Bruno Poirier of the Himalayan Races Association, who is organiser and a runner himself: "To run the Annapurnas with only a backpack and local hospitality is the fun part. And it's been going very smoothly, the logistics are great, and this year it was one of the best organised."

The French have a special place in their hearts for Annapurna, after all it was in 1952 that a French expedition led by Maurice Herzog scaled Annapurna I and the mountain became the first eight thousander ever to be climbed. Everest was climbed two years later.



From left to right: A marathoner on a rare level stretch in Manang, passing under a gate in Braga, Bruno Poirier huffs and puffs up Ghorepani with majestic Dhaulagiri in the background, and Mandala's logistics team poses after the trek in Pokhara.



Back in Kathmandu this week from the run, Poirier is already planning for the 2003 marathon. He intends to make it a family event by starting the race at Kaputar near Begnas Lake instead of Besi Sahar, the trail will then join the existing Manang route near Bhulbhuile. "Maybe next year we will get even more runners from all over the world," says Poirier.

All runners have to be registered, they carry a mandatory checklist of items including provisions and equipment up to ten kg. They can carry extra material, but that will weigh them down. The beginning of every run is flagged off, and there is a mid-point control check along the way, and then it is all the way to the night halt. The daily timings are added up for the totals for each runner.

There is a strong competition among the marathoners, but also a feeling of camaraderie. There is code of conduct for runners who have to help those in need along the way. For instance, not helping an injured or incapacitated fellow-runner gets you a punishment of 10 hours added to your final time. A French runner this year was penalised for not helping a fellow-Frenchman. There are also strict do's and don'ts about not acting arrogant, or pushing locals or other marathon venues. After all, with the Annapurna Mandela Marathon behind them, 42.5 horizontal km at sea level should be a piece of cake!

Many marathoners stop along the way at local tea houses for rest, but the more competitive ones race straight through the trail eating their high-calorie bars and drinking water while on the run.

This year, locals along the way gathered in large numbers to cheer the runners along. Nepali participants got loud cheers and shouts of encouragement. And the Nepali runners did the country proud. Of the seven Nepali participants, the

first five winners were Nepali. Dacchini from Takshindu was number one with a time of 30 hours 43 minutes and 54 seconds. He overtook last year's winner, Nar Bahadur Shah, on the downhill after Thorung. Shah, who is with the Royal Nepal Army, timed 32 hours 43 minutes and 54 seconds. Sumba Sherpa also from Takshindu came third with 33 hours 31 minutes and 40 seconds. In fourth place was Babu Raja Shrestha, a poultry farmer from Thankot who has been an athlete of his life.

The first among the European runners was Poirier himself, who came sixth clocking 36 hours 30 minutes and 41 seconds. With the runs, and the stellar performance of the Nepalis, the marathon is registering a lot of interest among locals along the Manang trail. Local tea shops are encouraged by the added business during times of a trekking slump. In Manang, the runners got a rousing send off and a cultural performance with music and dance before they headed off for Thorung La. Village youth clubs had inquiries about joining in next year's marathon.

At this rate, it would not be surprising if Nepalis start bagging medals in Olympic and other marathon venues. After all, with the Annapurna Mandela Marathon behind them, 42.5 horizontal km at sea level should be a piece of cake!

(Padam Ghaley is co-director of Mandala Treks and was in charge of the local logistics of the 2002 Annapurna Mandela Marathon. He was assisted by Bhim Banskota and Jerome Buda. To join the 2003 Marathon send hiedata to Mandala Treks, phone: 977-1-412 438 email: mandala@ms.com.np)

RAMYATA LIMBU

She's run the Atlanta Olympics, the Kathmandu Marathon, the SAF games and done the run in Hong Kong. But running in the Annapurna Mandela Marathon was a totally different experience for Bimala Rana Magar who says she is not using to running uphill. "Before this, the only uphill I'd done was run up Swyambhu," she laughs. Also, she is used to running in a sand vest and shorts, not with 10 kg on her back.

Back now in Kathmandu Bimala, 28, is sore but happy. "I'm so glad I completed the marathon without succumbing to high altitude," Bimala finished 18th out of 31 runners.

Bimala has run from Kathmandu to Hetauda, the old route, from Kathmandu to Melanchi as part of her long distance training. Five months back she and a bunch of long distance runners ran from Kathmandu to Muktimath. They were celebrating the 50th birthday of Nepal's most famous marathoner, Baikuntha Manandhar. "That was the first time I had been at a reasonably high altitude," says Bimala. "The route was much easier than the Annapurna Mandela Trail."

At Thorung Phedi, the runners were roused at 3 am

before they made their way upwards to the 5400m snow-bound Thorung La, and down to Marpha in Mustang. Bimala's preparation for the marathon consisted of her regular 90-minute run along Kathmandu's Ring Road, and her diet of dal-bhat. "I'd been training for the 3,000m or 1,500m events, which I used to run, and was in a special training camp. I'd probably be getting coached and extra diet. But marathon running in Nepal usually means you're on your own."

She considers herself fortunate to have a family, especially an elder brother, who encouraged her to run. "I started running late, after completing high school. I used to watch runners from the parapet and get the urge to join them." But she doesn't see an increasing number of women join the sport.

Bimala began training for marathons in 1993, and came third among women in the 42km Kathmandu Marathon in 1994, her first event. The following year, she came second. In the 7th SAF games in Madras she came fourth, and she came 11th in the 1999 Hong Kong Marathon.

In between running, Bimala is busy at her job, which is preparing voter's identity cards. "While attending college, I took some computer courses which helped me get

a job. One does have to work." Of course it would be ideal if she got a company to sponsor her for what she does best. "My dream is to become a coach. I can teach other young people what I have learnt. One has to recognise, train, and nurture talent. Despite the odds, she's keen to go the distance. "If I get a sponsor and someone to train me, I'm keen to do the Annapurna to Everest marathon this autumn."



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by ROBERT FISK

"Terror,



The real problem with Arafat is that he has a lot in common with Sharon: old, ruthless and cynical. Both men have come to despise each other.

After all, his killers have managed to murder dozens of Palestinian gunmen already, including occasional women and children who get in the way. The real problem with Arafat is that he has a lot in common with Sharon: old, ruthless and cynical; both men have come to despise each other. Sharon believes that the Palestinians can be broken by military power.

He doesn't realise what the rest of the world learned during Sharon's own 1982 siege of Beirut: that the Arabs are no longer afraid. Once a people lose their fear, they cannot be re-inoculated with fear. Once the suicide bomber is loose, the war cannot be won. And Arafat knows this.

No, of course he doesn't send the bombers off on their wicked missions to restaurants and supermarkets. But he does know that every suicide bombing destroys Sharon's credibility and proves that the Israeli leader's promises of security are false. Arafat is well aware that the ferocious bombings are serving his purpose—however much he may condemn them in public. But he—like Sharon—also believes his enemies can be broken by force.

He thinks that the Israelis can be frightened into withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem. Ultimately, the Israelis

probably will have to give up their occupation. But the Jews of Israel are not going to run or submit to an endless war of attrition. Even if Sharon is voted out of power—a prospect for which many Israelis pray—the next Israeli prime minister is not going to negotiate out of fear of the suicide bomber. Thus the rhetoric becomes ever more crude, ever more reviling.

Hamas calls its Jewish enemies "the sons of pigs and monkeys", while Israeli leaders have variously bestialised their enemies as "serpents", "crocodiles", "beasts" and "cockroaches". Now we have an Israeli officer—according to the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*—advising his men to use the tactics adopted by the Nazis in the Second World War.

"If four jobs in a week a densely packed refugee camp or take over the Nabulus cash, and if this job is given to an (Israeli) officer to carry out without casualties on both sides, he must before all else analyse and bring together the lessons of past battles, even—shocking though this might appear—to analyse how the German army operated in the Warsaw ghetto." "Paradox? What on earth does this mean? Does this account for the numbers marked by the leaders on the hands and foreheads of Palestinian prisoners earlier this month?

Does this mean that an Israeli soldier is now to regard the Palestinians as sub-humans—which is exactly how the Nazis regarded the trapped and desperate Jews of the Warsaw ghetto in 1944? Yet from Washington comes only silence. And silence, in law, gives consent. Should we be surprised? After all, the US is now making the rules as it goes along.

"Prisoners can be called 'illegal combatants' and brought to

Guanatanamo Bay with their mouths taped for semi-secrecy trials. The Afghan war is declared a victory—and then suddenly explodes again. Now we are told there will be other "fronts" in Afghanistan, a spring offensive? "terrorist" Washington has also said that its intelligence agencies—the heres who failed to discover the 11 September plot—have proof (undiscovered, of course) that Arafat has "a new alliance" with Iran, which brings the Palestinians into the "axis of evil".

If there is no one to challenge this stuff? Just over a week ago, CIA director George Tenet announced that Iraq had links with al-Qaeda. "Contacts and linkages", have been established, he told us. And that's what the headlines said. But then Tenet continued by saying that the mutual antipathy of al-Qaeda and Iraq towards America and Saudi Arabia suggests that tactical cooperation between them is possible? "Suggestive? Possible?" is that what Mr Tenet calls proof?

But now everyone is cashing in on the "war against terror". When Macedonia cops gun down seven Arabs, they announce that they are participating in the "global 'war on terror'". When Russians massacre Chechens, they are now prosecuting the "war on terror". When Israel fires at Arafat's headquarters, it says it is participating in the "war on terror". Must we all be hijacked into America's dangerous self-absorption with the crimes of 11 September? Must this vile war between America and the Israelis be distorted in so dishonest a way? ♦ (The Independent)

Nepal Britain Chamber of Commerce and Industry is deeply saddened at the demise of Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother of the United Kingdom.

Through the good office of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Nepal, (NBCCI) would like to convey its heartfelt condolences. We pray to the Almighty that her departed soul rests in peace.

for a

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by JEFFREY D SACHS

Dictating limits to dictators

The high costs of tyranny spill over to the rest of the world. What can be done?

the most fearful of challenging one of their own. So far, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has acquiesced to Mugabe's abuses. If that silence continues, it will gravely undermine SADC institutions, and cast a deep pall over the SADC's most important leader, South African President Thabo Mbeki.

Sanctions offer another approach. America, Europe, and other businesses should not continue to do "business as usual" with Zimbabwe. Mugabe and his henchmen have stolen millions of dollars abroad in the past year according to plausible press accounts. These accounts should be frozen, despite the difficulty in doing so in a world rife with secret banking and nominee companies that disguise true ownership. Mugabe's plenary elections should be unrecognised, and Mugabe denied a legitimate head of state in international gatherings.

Sanctions, however, are clumsy, costly, and often ineffective. They are insufficient to stop abuses (after all, sanctions were threatened before the elections) and risk pushing Zimbabwe's economy deeper into crisis, hurting millions of innocent people, especially during a period of intensifying hunger and drought. Sanctions are also unlikely to secure wide acclamation. Africans will no doubt feel Africa is being singled out unfairly when such abuses exist throughout the world.

An alternative approach, giving positive inducements to a tyrant to leave office, might sometimes work. Some long-time leaders have been coaxed from office through blandishments, high-profile international positions, or even amnesties and comfortable exiles in safe locations.

A more general, perhaps more powerful approach, is for the world to agree on general, enforceable political limits on what might conceivably win international consent, would be an "international term limit" on heads of government. The world community would agree that no individual should serve as the head of government (president, prime minister, or other equivalent position) for more than X years. International agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF would automatically say nothing to countries where the head of government exceeds that limit. Many countries already have such limits. In America, presidents are limited to two terms in office. In other countries, there is a single presidential term, usually five to eight years. The world might agree on a weaker, but globally acceptable minimum standard, say a term limit of no more than 20 years.

Even non-democracies such as China could accept this rule, because it would apply to heads of government, not ruling parties. China routinely denies the highest executive positions, as it enforces a change of power prevents tyrants from gaining excessive power, a lesson learned painfully during Mao's long, often disastrous reign. Corruption is limited by the frequent alternation of power, since tyrants typically need many years to build up systems of mega-corruption, usually involving family and business associates.

An international term limit could infringe the right of a real democracy to keep a popular leader for more than 20 years. Helmut Kohl and his 16 years in office in Germany approached this limit. But even in strong democracies, the final years of a long reign are typically the worst. Kohl's last years, for example, were marked by electoral corruption. Given the incredible advantages incumbents have over challengers in nearly every political system, a firm time limit would strengthen the strongest existing democracies.

The roster of long-serving heads of government in the twentieth century—Stalin, Mao, Franco, Kim Il Sung, and Ceausescu—makes it clear that an enforced international term limit would have spared the world considerable grief and turmoil. In our much more democratic and interconnected world, it is possible a clear international norm limiting time in power could spare the world from dictatorship and destabilisation in the future. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is professor of economics and director of the Center for International Development, Harvard University.

by KAUSHIK BASU

Trade and the Third World

While much lower than previously, it is higher than in most industrial nations. But India independently decided to raise the next three years. A global program to lower tariffs means that India would be asked to do what it planned to do anyway. As others would have to lower their tariffs, India's access to other markets would increase.

Nowadays, economic policy is so complex that it is not always clear what is good for a nation and what is not. Last December, there was a furor in India when a dispute settlement panel of the WTO ruled against India's practice of (1) forcing automobile manufacturers in India to buy a certain proportion of parts from Indian producers, and (2) requiring automotive manufacturers who need to import parts and kits to export goods worth the same value.

If we reflect on these conditions, it is not at all clear that these policies are good for India. Forcibly creating a market for Indian automobile parts eases pressure on these manufacturers to improve quality. Forcing Indian cars to use such parts handicaps Indian cars from matching international quality. And other emerging economies must engage with the WTO, keeping pressure on it to give more voice to developing countries. There are, for example, 18 African countries without any representation in the WTO's office in Geneva. What benefit can they expect from the WTO?

When there is a WTO legal tussle and big countries bring in expensive lawyers to argue their case, what chance do poor countries have? As democratic countries with considerable expertise in economics and law, India should fight for better representation throughout the WTO. Once that is achieved, it will be easier to entreat the WTO with tasks, such as assuring minimal labor standards that appear contentious today. But a rule to remember is that even if it is not achieved, India and countries like it will gain more by being active participants in WTO deliberations than by withdrawing or being habitual naysayers. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Kaushik Basu is professor of economics at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, and currently visiting at MIT.

Sri Lanka talks in Bangkok

BANGKOK: Thailand's reputation as a neutral player on the global stage strengthens its case as an ideal venue for the first round of imminent peace talks between the Sri Lanka government and the Tamil Tiger rebels. On March 26, a ranking member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as the Tamil rebels are formally known, virtually confirmed the story doing the rounds in Colombo's diplomatic and government circles—that the South-East Asian kingdom was the chosen venue. There has been no official announcement of the venue for the talks as yet.

But the statement by Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, that Thailand is the preferred venue for peace talks put to rest speculation that Sri Lanka's closest neighbours—India and the Maldives—would host discussions to end the over two decades of ethnic conflict in the South Asian island nation. Balasingham returned to Sri Lanka in the last week of March from Britain, where he had been living in self-imposed exile for three years. His arrival is expected to spur the groundwork being prepared by the recently elected United National Front (UNF) government in Colombo and the Tamil Tiger leadership for the talks, which may begin early May. (IPS)

Post-Enron Narmada

NEW DELHI: India can teach more lessons in the financing of power projects than learn them, says a report released this week, which uses Enron's discredited megaproject in the country and the controversial Narmada Valley project to expose the murky workings of indirect funding for such schemes.

The report, "Power Finance: Financial Institutions in India's Power Sector", banks on the Indian experience to examine the latest trends in the financing of development projects and in the process untangles what its publishers call "the complicated web" through which large dam projects are funded through financial intermediaries. "Power Finance", published by International Rivers Network, Ugrawala and the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, also documents resistance to uneconomical and destructive projects in India.

"Finally, we have a single document that outlines all our struggles over all these years," Vimala Bhai, campaigner for the umbrella National Alliance of People's Movements, says of the report, authored by Peter Bosshard, former secretary of the Berne Declaration. (IPS)

MAOBAADI QUAGHIRE

A SPECIAL LOOK AT NEPAL'S MAOIST WAR

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Private Sector Promotion (PSP) is a Nepalese-German technical cooperation project implemented by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Industrial Enterprises Development Institute (IEDI). The project is in its first implementation phase, which runs from 1 May 2001 to 30 April 2004. The project aims to create jobs through enhancing the capacities of selected enterprises in the small and medium-size enterprise sector.

Core Tasks:

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PSP offers, for this post starting on 1 June 2002 and based in Kathmandu, a competitive salary and other facilities commensurate with the qualifications and experience of the applicant according to GTZ regulations. Interested applicants should send their CV, 2 references and a passport size photograph to the following address by 19 April 2002. Telephone enquiries will not be entertained. Only short listed candidates will be contacted.

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“Dummy government?”

Chalghal, 31 March
(Excerpts from Madhav Kumar Nepal's statement in parliament demanding an explanation from the prime minister)

"We have taken the statement made by the Chief of the Army Staff on 27 March very seriously. The statement asks why the people's representatives have not supported the security forces. Reading the full text, we found other very serious issues in it. The allegations in the statement have raised questions about the authority and duties [of the CoAS] and at what point such statements cross the limits of decency. We are confused, if any type of discipline takes root in the nation, it will be very difficult to return to normal. We are deeply worried about these things.

The prime minister and the defence minister is [are] automatically responsible for statements made by the CoAS. The defence minister is responsible being the line minister, and as chair of the National Security Council, the prime minister is answerable for the issues raised. We demand a satisfying explanation to the matters raised in the statement from the prime minister.

Some may agree with the CoAS' statement, so they may not think it is necessary to discuss its subject matter. But the question is not about the matters raised, it is who said these things, and where. What would happen if the chief secretary were to go around saying there is bad governance in the country? What would happen if a secretary went around making political speeches? Can we accept it if people in responsible positions in government go around opposing or criticising the government's performance? We are now forced to ask such questions.

...We are highlighting in this house of people's representatives the concerns raised by the people about the CoAS' statement. People have to be capable of understanding their limits and responsibilities. We must all stay within our limits. What would happen to this country if we all started crossing the line? We have to be able to separate the good from the bad, the right from the wrong. We must be able to point out shortcomings. But what is the appropriate place to point out what is wrong, what is the appropriate medium and audience, how should such things be said—all these things have their own definitions and meanings, and fixed limits. We must respect these limits.

...We don't know if Sher Bahadur Deuba's government is a dummy, or whether it is actually running the country. If it is a dummy government, why is the Nepal Congress still supporting it... this government is helpless, just a shadow. Why has a puppet government been allowed to continue its show? We cannot understand why the Nepal Congress is content with watching a puppet show. A puppet government must be overthrown. The Nepal Congress has to form a more real government... We are also surprised by statements of the party president [Girija Prasad Koirala] that the state of emergency was declared because the army demanded it. Who will tell us what is happening, that is unclear even though we have a majority government? Who will explain all this to us—isn't this the responsibility of the prime minister?

...We see these kinds of contradictions in a situation where the prime minister is weak, helpless and powerless. He cannot speak in front of others, he just projects a helpless decency. He tries to lie to everyone, he is unable to understand his own status, duties and responsibilities. That is why we have been hearing statements from the prime minister such as because "everyone has said..." "you have said..." "I have talked..." or "you said strike, so I've struck" [an earlier Deuba statement in parliament]. That was why we asked whether this country has a prime minister or a robot? ...If the prime minister is a robot, we have nothing to say except that the country does not need a robot as a prime minister.

...We don't think it is a valid charge that we haven't supported the security forces. The entire parliament rallied the emergency. Would the emergency have been possible if the people's representatives had not backed it? ...There is no mention of that in the statement... The people's representatives [accused in the statement by the Chief of Army Staff Prajwal Rana of refusing to go to their constituencies] may also have their concerns. They have been told: don't go to the villages, don't visit the districts. They have been told not to move around in groups of more than one or two people, they've been told don't organise meetings, and don't conduct any political activities now. On the one hand you say this, on the other you say that you don't have the support of the people's representatives. Isn't this contradictory?

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We come from a tradition where citizens are treated as 'subjects', our tradition of centralised rule still holds the concept that rulers are 'more equal' and people are insignificant. Or we're still a feudal, centralised state.

—Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani, Vice President of Rastriya Prajatantra Party in Budhhar, 3 April



Rock: Nepal Bandh
Board: SLC examination centre

प्रकाश चन्द्र लोहनी, स्पेक्ट्रम डैनिक, 31 मार्च

United we pass

Samacharpatra, 31 March

The five-day Nepal bands called by the underground Maoist party is going to affect 250,000 students who are to appear in this year's annual School Leaving Certificate examination. The bandh is called from 2 April, which is the day the exams start. Still, the student unions are silent about the bandh and the effect it will have on the students and their exams.

The Nepal Congress and its youth wings, namely the Tarun Dal and the Nepal Students' Union have not spoken out strongly against the Maoist call for a nationwide shutdown. Similarly, the main opposition CPN-UML and its youth wings are equally passive. Other parties in the opposition are also inert—they have issued statements, but none has initiated a joint action against the call for the bandh, which will affect the nation very adversely.

Despite this, the spokesperson at the Ministry of Education is hopeful that the political parties and their youth wing will aid in ensuring that the annual examinations can be conducted smoothly. "We have mobilised all the security agencies, and hope that all the political parties, their youth organisations and civil society will join in our endeavour to provide security to the students," says Yub Raj Pandey.

When the government is so openly seeking the participation of other political parties and their youth wings in ensuring the SLC exams are administered without a hitch, why are the political parties not acting. "We are ready to support the government," Bisha Prakash Sharma, President of the Nepal Students' Union said. However, he did not explain how his organisation would go about that. "We will discuss it with other student unions and work out a plan to provide protection for students taking the SLC examination," Sharma said, without announcing any timeframe.

Yogya Raj Sunwar of the All-Nepal Free Students' Union also claimed that his union is willing to offer assistance to the government for security during the SLC exams, but he does not have a concrete plan either. "We are holding discussion within our union, and with other unions too," he said.

Nepal student unions have a history of fighting each other physically on various non-student political issues. But they seem reluctant to share their zeal and strength to fight united against this attack by the Maoists on the future of over 250,000 students. "There are examples in world history when student unions have put aside their differences and united to fight a national crisis," says educationist Dr Man Prasad Wagle. "If Nepal students had rallied around the coming ahead in order to accomplish their task. The army will not engage in talks, but keeping doing its work until the talks conclude and it is ordered to retreat.



Handup! You criminals, you want to become doctors and intellectuals like us?

Frequent fliers

Deshantari, 31 March

The government has not curtailed foreign travel and associated expenses even during a state of emergency. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who went ministers on junkets to Bangkok as a strategy to cling to power [in his earlier stint], seems to be using the same formula now. Ministers have travelled extensively during the past few months, the finance, agriculture and information and communications ministers are the most frequent fliers. Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahar travelled to Sri Lanka, India, Mexico and the Maldives. Minister for Agriculture Madhes Acharya visited Pakistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The Minister for Information and Communication Jayaprakash Prasad Gupta went to Pakistan, Turkey and Bangkok. Some other ministers who have travelled during the period include the Minister for Women and Social Welfare Rajendra Kharel who went to Japan; Minister for Industry and Supplies Purush Bahadur Khakha, Germany; Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Bal Bahadur KC, Germany; Minister for Health Shanti Singh Bahadur, Brazil; Science and Technology Minister Bhakti Bahadur Balyar, India; United States; State Minister for Health Mohan Bahadur Basnet, Switzerland; State Minister for Foreign Affairs Arjun Bang Bahadur Singh, India and State Home Minister Devendra Raj Kandel, Indonesia.

Talk, Talk

Deshantari, 31 March

(Excerpts from an interview with Dhruva Bahadur Tripathi, former Inspector General of Police)



The Maoists have been told laying down their weapons is a condition for a fresh round of talks...

Such a condition may not be completely appropriate. That is, after all, something to be decided during the talks. You decide when to stop fighting during talks. The first negotiations began after the cessation of hostilities on both sides, and no one attacked each other. You can even have talks now, not necessarily by

stopping the fighting.

You are said to have first designed the Integrated Security and Development Program (ISDP), but leaders did not listen...

What can I gain by blaming them now? We made a programme based on the problem then, and the needs that were relevant at that time. We could have succeeded in resolving the Maoist problem, but the government treated it casually, it didn't give it due importance.

Do you think the problem can be resolved militarily? There could be a resolution, but it can take time. What will the parties and their youth wing then is more important. We need a quick solution, talks are one way to get there faster. I am not saying that the deployment of troops should stop, that is something the government must decide. We could destroy ourselves if we do not find a quick resolution to the problem.

Are talks possible now?

This government failed in the earlier talks. If it starts talking again, that could happen again. Others have to initiate the talks, leaders of parties in power today need to take a decision.

So any talks now must be of a different order from the earlier ones?

Yes. They should be such that there is no need to stop the fighting for them. This is where there could also be a role for the king. Who will give the mandate for the talks? Who is the authority to say okay, go and initiate talks? This is not the time to compete against each other and talk about other unrelated things.

Is the king also needed in the context of talks?

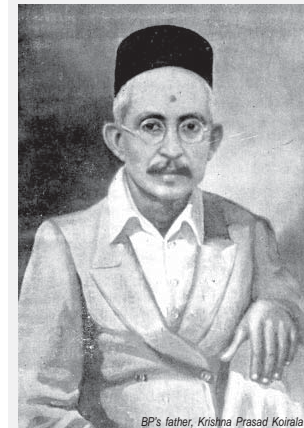
Possibly. What are the dangers of not finding an immediate solution? It could end our nationhood, destroy our nation.

Are talks really possible in places of war?

There is no relationship between negotiations and the security situation. The security forces should not need to worry about whether or not the talks are taking place, they shouldn't even think about it. The leadership engages in talks, there is no relationship between talks and the fighting.

What about the morale of the fighting forces?

They will continue moving ahead in order to accomplish their task. The army will not engage in talks, but keeping doing its work until the talks conclude and it is ordered to retreat.



BP's father, Krishna Prasad Koirala

BP at Sundariraj turns away from more mundane matters and begins to analyse the political situation outside the walls, will King Mahendra see him? What is the monarchy's role? He reads the history of intrigue and betrayals, and wonders if that will ever change.

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Back at Sundariraj >8

“The ship is sinking.”

12 January, 1977

GM (Ganesh Man Singh) reminds me that we have returned to Nepal as captains of the ship (that is Nepal). The ship, according to our calculation and for everybody to see, is sinking. We have rushed to its rescue, and in case it has to sink, we will not have our place and run for safety, but will go down with it. If the other party, (ie the King who is captain today and whose piloting is responsible for the ship being in the present stormy sea and predicament) doesn't in its senses yield to our piloting, and doesn't permit us in its calculation then Nepal as a state and nation will be obliterated from the map and we patriots will also perish in this national obliteration. Therefore we should not unnecessarily brood over as to whether King (King Mahendra) will see us and discuss things with us or whether this thing would happen or that, if he doesn't, everything is lost. We shouldn't calculate the loss because the loss is total and cataclysmic. We should rather think over the points that may come up for discussion with the King and what steps, immediate and long range. We should take to affect remedial and permanent results, in the case talk with the King is successful. GM prepares tea, both in the early morning and afternoon, and during these hours we discuss politics.

We again asked for a doctor and a dentist, the Major also feels helpless. He says that he has repeatedly sent word to the army HQ that we are asking for a doctor everyday in the morning. He himself doesn't know why this delay. He has asked us to speak to the general who would be coming to the camp to supervise the interviews on Saturday (is 2nd of Magh). We think that it is in keeping with the policy of keeping us uncommunicated that the doctors are not sent. But if the interviews are granted then our analyses with regard to our solitary confinement proves wrong.

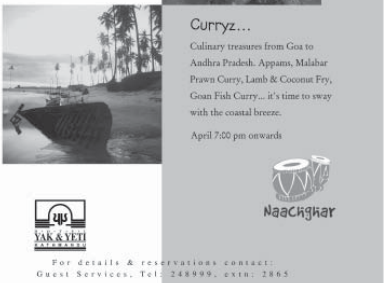
I did some washing, took a bath—my second bath after I arrived here. I rub oil, stay in the sun for some time and when I am sufficiently warm I rush to the bath room, stand under the running tap, rub my body briskly, stand under the running tap once again before I rub off with the wet and rough towel and return to the room with the tingling sensation of health. The water is so cold that it beats like a hammer on the back of the head unless you know how quickly to remove your head from the running water. Even after that for some time the head aches. Perhaps it is nature warning that enough is enough.

13th January, 1977

Having nothing better to do I started leafing Rishikesh Shah's 'An Introduction to Nepal' which GM had bought. It is not a substantial book, and Shah himself was a little apologetic about it, saying that it was written for one who had no idea about Nepal—for some foreigner who wouldn't know facts about it—in a hurry. I read the chapter dealing with the Shah period, Pritivi N Shah and the coming of Jang Bahadur. The story is replete with court intrigues, murders, chicanery, betrayals and machination of our ambitious queens, the most numerous of the protagonists. Shah has not written a word about how they administered the country, in a country that has a monarchy of such tradition the unbridled royal power is a menace. I don't know how far culture and modern political spirit is imbued by present incumbent whose ancestral legacy is dripping with horror. Will the modern prevail over the medieval in the palace atmosphere? Will the modern prevail over the medieval in the formulation of state policy? Royal vs the People, the Palace vs the country? That is the question whose answer one way or the other will divide the fate of Nepal one way or the other.

When my father died in prison in 1945, he was most probably 66 years old, my mother was probably 48 years. I was 30 years and something—Bunu, our youngest sister was 13. I am now 62 years and a half. Sushila, 10 years my junior is 52, Prakash 30 years and 4 months, and my youngest Chetna is 17 years and a half. This idea of death, a macabre imagination induced perhaps by jail condition where one doesn't know when and if one would be relieved sometimes crosses my mind and that father had died in the Rana prison puts into me the idea of my own death in prison. After that a chain reaction starts in my mind—Mother, Sushila, myself, Prakash, Bunu and Chetna. I also know that time is on our side. Therefore I have to live. If father had survived even for a year, he would have witnessed the tremendous transformation in the political scene of the Indian Sub-Continent. Juddha SS would have abdicated, Padma SS would have been the PM. In India, the British would have gone. Did father have the slightest inkling of the coming events of such earthshaking dimensions? I have to live. I don't have to be told by astrologers, some of whom have predicted a bright future for me provided my health doesn't betray me that someday I will triumph, our cause will win, the people will prevail, - I will see myself all this happening.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

◆ **Stupas, Stones and Space** Exhibition of solo paintings on Nepali paper by German artist Dagmar Mathes. 8–20 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal, Revisited

EVENTS

- ◆ **Nepali classical dance and folk music** Dances of Hindu and Buddhist gods. Tuesdays and Fridays, 7PM onwards, the Great Pagoda Hall. Ticket and tea Rs 400. Nepali folk tunes Wednesdays and Saturdays, 6.30PM onwards. Hotel Vajra. 271545
- ◆ **Red Ribbon Grid Celebrate Nepal New Year** with a mix of Nepali performers like Ram Shrestha, Alibabros, Hybrid, Pressurized as well as the Australian band The Agents. 13 April, Hotel De L' Annapurna
- ◆ **New Year at Rox Bar** Celebrate New Year's eve with pulsating music, exciting cocktails, and tempting Nepali snacks. Guest performer will be singing popular Nepali numbers. Tickets single Rs 400, couple Rs 750. Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency

MUSIC

- ◆ **1974 AD** will be playing their hit numbers in Jatra, Thamel 6 April, 6PM. Only 70 seats available. Reserve your tickets on time. Call 433659. Tickets Rs 250
- ◆ **The Nuns Welfare Foundation of Nepal** presents the third annual evening of Tibetan chants and more with Ani Choyin Doma, Manose on flute and others. 7 April, 6PM, Patan Museum Café. Tickets Rs 600 at Dragonfly at Mike's Breakfast, and Patan Museum Café. For details email nwf@choyin.com
- ◆ **Australyearhhhh!** Music festival from the land down under organised by Eternity Music Festival 2002 with support from the Australian Embassy featuring artists like The Agents, Ruby and Jade, The Koomari Dancers and solo performances by Simon Russell Baker, David Lloyd Jones and Koda Jo Berry. 10-11 April, 7PM, Trendy Thatch, Hotel de L' Annapurna. Tickets Rs 250.
- ◆ **All that Jazz Afro Dizzi Act** performs their last gig in Nepal. 12 April, 7.30 PM. Nepa-Dhuku Ballroom. Radisson Hotel. Tickets Rs 500
- ◆ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Run Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

DRINK

- ◆ **Meter of Malt** Exhibition and tasting of Single Malts like Knockando, Cardhu, Cragganmore, Glenkinchie, Glenlivet and more all imported from Scotland. Rs. 999/- net per package. Piano Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999

FOOD

- ◆ **Groove with the Roos** Special evening of fabulous Australian buffet, free flow of wine, with live music. 12 April, 7PM. Trendy Thatch, Hotel de L' Annapurna. Tickets Rs 999/- net
- ◆ **Saturday Live Buffet** with unlimited draught beer and live music by the Rusty Nails. The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel, 11.30AM-2.30PM, Saturdays. 411818
- ◆ **The new Roadhouse Café** Completely redesigned with separate bar seating and coffee bar. Original Mediterranean specialities and wood-fired pizzas. The Roadhouse Café, Thamel.
- ◆ **Taste of Beijing** Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre. 468589
- ◆ **Kebab and Biryani** Nawabi delicacies straight from the tandoor – Biryani and Kebabs at the Café. Dum ki Raan, Mugh Tikka Nawabi and more. Mixed seafood Biryani is a must try. 12-26 April, Hyatt Regency. 491234
- ◆ **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, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- ◆ **Lunch, tea and dinner** European and American cuisine with fine wines. La'Soon Restaurant and Vinohque, Pulchowk. 535290
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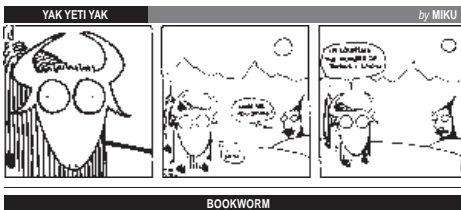
NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

All this rain just goes to show you that weather forecasting is an inexact science. We predicted some rain last week, but not the massive hailstorms we witnessed Monday and Tuesday. This satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows the big clouds over central Nepal dumping rain on us. These have now moved rapidly towards Assam. But there is another westerly front over Afghanistan and it is headed our way. Expect more showers, more storms into the weekend and next week. Notice how the plains are clear, they will stay that way. Drop in temperature with increased cloud cover.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
27-12	28-11	28-12	28-11	27-11



BOOKWORK



Pilgrimage in Tibet Alex McKay, ed. Carzon Press, London Rs 5310

Tibetans have traditionally mapped out their land in terms of sacred space, and pilgrimage throughout these areas covered a high degree of mobility within all classes of traditional Tibetan society. Leading scholars of Asian pilgrimage traditions discuss historical and contemporary aspects of pilgrimage within the Tibetan cultural world. Myths and legends, material conditions, textual sources, a modern pilgrim's impressions, political and economic influence, biographies, and contemporary development are examined in this major new work.

Luminous Lives Cyrus Stearns Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2001 Rs 2860

This is the first in-depth study of the literature and history of the Lam 'bras, the Tantric Buddhist tradition, practiced in Tibet for almost a thousand years, most prominently within the Sa skya lineage. The central focus of the story is a rare Tibetan history that brings alive the story of the earliest men and women practitioners of the Lam 'bras.



Counsels from My Heart Dudjom Rinpoche Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2001 Rs 1620

Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987) was a highly revered Buddhist meditation master and the leader of the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Dudjom Rinpoche calls upon us to follow Buddha's instructions to "get a grip on our minds" pointing the way to give up our habitual ways of behaving in order to liberate ourselves from suffering and also offers advice on how to view the Vajrayana teachings.

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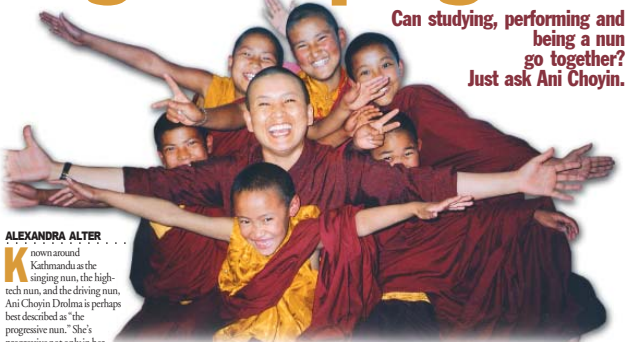
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ARTS

Pilgrim's progress

Can studying, performing and being a nun go together? Just ask Ani Choyin.



ALEXANDRA ALTER

Known around Kathmandu as the singing nun, the high-tech nun, and the driving nun, Ani Choyin Drolma is perhaps best described as the "progressive nun." She's progressive not only in her embrace of modern technology (she drives a car, rides rollercoasters and uses a cellular phone), but in her magnanimous goal of fostering a better educated, more socially engaged community of nuns.

Though the status of nuns, like that of women in general, has improved since the women were ordained in India around the time of Sakyamuni Buddha, even today nuns have far fewer opportunities to study than monks. Generally, they are expected to engage in prayers and pujas within the monastery, while monks occupy themselves with more rigorous intellectual pursuits, such as Buddhist philosophy and debate. The more subtle and difficult aspects of Buddhist philosophy, which most monks are obliged to master, are rarely taught in nunneries in Nepal. "Our strong, Most people don't encourage women to be active and educated. As a result, monasteries get more financial support than nunneries, so they get better facilities. It's not that nuns are stupid or that they can't study, it's just that the financial support isn't there," explains Ani Choyin.

In an effort to remedy the glaring discrepancy between monks and nuns' education, in 1998 Ani Choyin established the Nuns' Welfare Foundation, which aims at improving the education and status of nuns.

The way to Mexico is too far. Botega Restaurant and Tequila Bar is near Thamel Chowk. 266433. 15 percent off season discount

Three years ago, she started the foundation's first major project, the

Anya Tan School for nuns. "There are no many academic institutions for monks that is difficult to even count them. It's hard to think of any other similar institution for nuns," Ani Choyin said.

As a young nun at Nagi Gumba, Ani Choyin didn't have the opportunity to engage in academic study, but she managed to learn English and basic medical skills through private instruction, which she claims improved her confidence enormously. Now, she hopes to help other nuns achieve the same degree of self-assurance. "In just a few years, I've seen the difference an education makes for these girls," Ani Choyin said.

And indeed, the young nuns at the Anya Tan School are bright, confident, and outgoing.

Ani Choyin calls her institution a school rather than a nunnery because she's more of an educator than a spiritual director. Nuns from any nunnery in Nepal can come to the Anya Tan School to engage in serious study for a maximum of eight years and then return to their nunneries, where they will be equipped to teach and provide basic medical services.

With four albums out, including a more innovative collection of dance music that layers traditional chanting and modern, trip-hop beats, Ani Choyin has effected countless people through her music and become something of a celebrity—no doubt a first for a Buddhist nun. In the midst of it all, however, Ani Choyin remains focused, humble, and dedicated to the memory of Tulla Ugen Rinpoche.

Although her initial US and European tours were enormously successful, Ani Choyin had reservations about performing in Kathmandu at first. "I wasn't sure how the local people would react," she says. "This is something completely new for a Buddhist nun to be doing. People want to see a nun who is secluded and quietly saying mantras, not performing and socialising."

Like any groundbreaking performer, Ani Choyin has had caustic criticism as well as fervent praise. Conservatives within the Buddhist community consider her conduct unseemly for a nun and disapprove of her reformist educational agenda. "People very ignorantly cling to their own narrow ideas of what it is to be Buddhist. I may not follow all the conventions of being a Buddhist nun, but my belief and vision are very clear."

Irrespressibly optimistic, Ani Choyin continues to defy her critics and raise money for her foundation by singing. On 7 April, she will perform in their third annual fundraising concert at the Patan Museum, and after that, she'll be touring the US and Europe for two months. Though performing for such a long stretch is incredibly demanding, Ani Choyin never gets tired of singing. "Singing is the best job in the world," she says. "It makes others happy, it makes me happy." And it might help pave the way for young nuns to practice what they believe. ♦

that she now performs around the world. The chants originate from a practice called Chod, or "cutting," because engaging in the practice helps to cut through egoistic tendencies. "Singing or listening to these songs gives rise to a mental state where there is no negativity, no clinging, no duality," says Ani Choyin. People who've heard her sing are quickly convinced of the subliminal effects of her music. Her voice has a natural clarity and organic quality that perfectly conveys the spontaneous and ecstatic nature of the songs.

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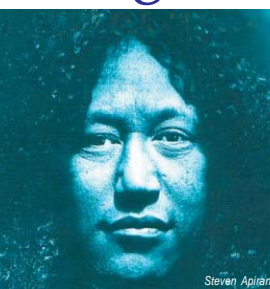
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Tickets for Ani Choyin's Patan Museum concert are available for Rs 600 at Dragonfly in Mike's Breakfast and the Patan Museum café. The concert begins at 6PM on 7 April.

The show must go on



Looks like there is no end to music this season. No sooner had we got over the hangover of the Kathmandu Jazz Festival than we had the Sounds of Spring. And now, guess what mate, the Australians are back!

Bands like The Agents, the cabaret couple Ruby and Jade, the aboriginal dance group The Koomari Dancers and solo performers like Simon Russell Baker, David Lloyd and Koda Jo Berry will be performing at the Hotel Annapurna and Hotel Yak and Yeti along with a host of talented Nepali bands next week.

The Agents, are a three piece blues, rock and soul band known for their energetic and dynamic shows in pubs and clubs around Australia. The drummer and vocalist Ian Farrington has toured the world as drummer for rock stars the likes of Phil Collins, Dire Straits and even the Mick Jagger Band. The Agents will play popular covers including those of Eric Clapton, Jim Hendrix, and Santana. While Farrington is the only original member of the band the two others joining him on this trip are Robert Kani and Steven Apirana. Steven is a Māori singer gifted vocalist and guitarist specialising in the blues. He has toured with Daddy Cool, Black Sabbath, Split Enz, and Dragon. With three CD's to his name Steve is a regular performer at festivals in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Holland.

Among the solo performers David Lloyd Jones, a New Zealander currently living in Australia, began his musical career at the age of 19 as a guitarist and support act for different bands playing covers such as Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, Eagles etc. Australian Simon Russell Baker plays keyboard and is also a vocalist and an actor appearing in such musicals as Pippin and Into the Woods. Koda Jo Bery, a West Indian has had solo performances since the age of four and sings R&B, soul and has also appeared numerous times on television.

The show begins at 7PM on 10 April at Hotel De L' Annapurna. Tickets for the shows on 10 and 11 April are priced at Rs 250 each. On 12 April a special show with the artists, an Australian buffet dinner and Ozzie wine will also take place. Tickets for this are priced at Rs 999 net. Special Australian buffets will also be included in the different events. The final performances of Aussie musicians will be on 19 April to commemorate the World Earth Day (22 April) at the Hotel Yak & Yeti.

Have all moved to
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Under One Roof As

gtz
Rural Programme Nepal



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

His Excellency Ramesh the Rhino

Landlocked Nepal has always been a pesky pebble between two enormous yams. But today we find ourselves trapped between the devil and a hard place. In other words, we are now firmly ensconced between a rock and the deep blue sea.

Despite this predicament, it is heartening to learn from the main news on Radio Nepal this morning that our leaders still have the presence of mind to remember that today is the National Day of the friendly nation of Guinea-Bissau, and therefore time to shoot off yet another one of those annual telegrams to wish the Numero Uno of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Guinea-Bissau best wishes for his personal health and happiness, and offer warmest felicitations for the future peace and prosperity of friendly Guinean-Bissau.

This is what being a proud and committed member of the international community of nations is all about: exchanging telegraphic bonhomies and wishing each other all the best on our national holidays. With permission from the chair, I would like to suggest that we move with the times and stop using telex and telegraph for these greetings. Telepathy is a more secure channel, and it is also much cheaper.

The other cost-effective method of keeping our relations with friendly countries on an even keel is to employ the time-tested method of donating our wildlife to their zoos. As a matter of fact, zoological diplomacy has a glorious tradition in Nepal under which we gift endangered species to countries to which we wish to offer Most-Favoured Nation trading status.

Our latest foray into wildlife diplomacy was the arrival at Jawalakhel Zoo last month of His Excellency a Hippopotamus. In exchange we dispatched

Ramesh the One-horned Rhino as our Roving Ambassador-at-Large and Plenipotentiary to the Chrysanthemum Throne. But despite his diplomatic impunity, Ramesh had a tough time convincing the visa officer at the Japanese embassy he was not one of the rhinos being translocated to Bardia who bought his way out and escaped en route. Good thing Ramesh has a thick skin, otherwise he'd have impaled a couple of those chaps behind the glass window.

But Ramesh's travails were not over. Just before boarding his flight, security refused to clear him saying his horn could be classified as a "sharp object" and it had to be stowed with his nail file in this checked-in luggage. This made Ramesh very horny, but a diplomatic incident was averted when an alert member of the cabin crew agreed to allow him on board if the horn was blunted by sawing off the tip.

Despite these teething problems, zoological diplomacy has a lot of potential.

The urban crow is an endangered species in many developed countries. Nepal has a surplus. The law of supply and demand dictates that we export the entire cohort that lives on a tree outside my window to a crowd-deficit country like Sao Tome and Principe.

The pack of howling dingos that defend our friendly neighbourhood trash heap can all be sent off to South Korea in the run-up to the World Cup. Then there is the common housefly, on the verge of extinction in Europe, but of which we have swarms of in Shyam's Bus Stop Tea Shop. These animals can serve as Nepal's honorary envoys abroad and ensure that our age-old bonds of amity and co-existence with the president and people of Togo are further strengthened in the years to come. ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Siddharth's spice and style

Having notched up some years of designing experience down south in his fatherland, Siddharth Gopalan decided it was time to add some spice to his motherland.

Siddharth's mother is a chhetri from Dharan and father is a South Indian brahmin, and at 25 this architect is already making his mark in Kathmandu.

After getting to Kathmandu three years ago and designing a resort-farmhouse in Chitwan, word of the simplicity and elegance of Siddharth's work spread quickly. More assignments followed: Sipradi, the Australian Embassy, and (ahem!) our very own Himalmedia. Now, the best example of this young Indo-Nepali architect's talent is not swanky offices and the bedrooms of the rich and famous, but on full display at the newly-opened Roadhouse Café in Thamel.

Tired of having to pay the same old architects for designs he had to dismantle almost on an annual basis, Chandan Kayastha was on the look out for someone who could make his diverse Roadhouse Café crowd feel at home. Having already turned off a few other eager beavers, Chandan's imagination was immediately captured when he saw what Siddharth had to offer.

"One should always respect one's culture, but at the same time be bold enough to use the imagination. What we have done here is not purely Nepali but at

the same time there is a bit of Nepal too. Tourists relate it to the Caribbean islands, some to Mexico and some to huts in Tharu villages," says the designer.

Sack loads of ammonite stones transported from the banks of the Kali Gandaki stud the walls. ("Some of them have ammonite fossils inside, but we haven't opened them yet.") The walls have that muddy brown "lpeko" touch so familiar in traditional Nepali homes. Dried corn and garlands of chili and garlic hang from the walls, while the antique window grills give a touch of the old aristocratic Kathmandu.

Siddharth has made a point of using material leftover from previous eras. Old wooden beams (uninhabited termite holes intact) provide ceiling support, water pipes are repurposed as wine bottle holders, cement mixing plates serve as light shades (we liked the way the pinpoints of light poetically illuminate our cigarette exhaust) and there is even an antique wooden door leading to the kitchen.



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