



Before the ceasefire
announcement
and after.
Read all about it in
Himal Khabarpatrika



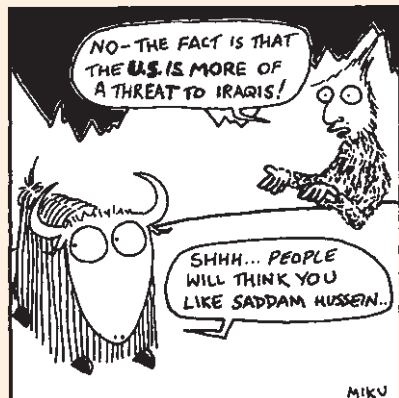
Donors glad

Foreign countries have generally welcomed the dramatic ceasefire announcements by the Maoists and government. An Indian Embassy statement said it had "noted" the developments and added, "To achieve durable peace, security and stability in Nepal, we believe that the process of dialogue should be based on national consensus, should involve political parties and should be conducted in an environment free from violence."

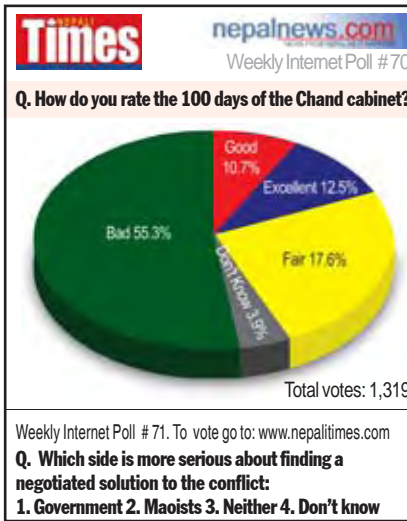
The US Embassy said, "We welcome the immediate cessation of all Maoist military activities and terrorist attacks as concrete evidence that the Maoists are serious about holding peace talks with the Nepali government."

The British Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien said from London, "A lot of work needs to be done, and it is vital that all groups in Nepal do everything they can to end the pain and suffering this conflict has caused." German envoy Rudiger Lemp welcomed the truce announcement and assured full cooperation from the European Community.

Yak is back



Yak Yeti Yak, the famous comic strip of an existential yeti and a talkative yak is back after a sabbatical, see page 14.



A ceasefire is the beginning of the peace process, not the end.

ANALYSIS by KUNDA DIXIT
Once there was the political will, everything else fell into place. Even so, there was finger-biting tension on that rainy Wednesday morning this week when it was touch-and-go till the last minute. As ministerial mediator, Narayan Singh Pun, shuttled back and forth between the Maoist leadership and the cabinet room until the ceasefire agreement was done.

The question many are asking is: Why did King Gyanendra and the Maoists decide to patch up now?

The Maoists were beginning to feel the pressure from a cadre base that grew too rapidly, and was getting out of control. A newly-bedfed-up army could drag on the war. And they were also feeling the squeeze from New Delhi, which was getting anxious about a possible spill-over, as well as Americans running around its backyard. Then, there was a real danger of being slotted into America's terror list.

King Gyanendra, on the other hand, needed

a peace dividend to bolster his own legitimacy and that of a government he appointed four months ago after sacking an elected prime minister. The king had staked everything on his October 4 move, and needed to pull this rabbit out of the hat.

Whatever the behind-the-scenes tradeoffs, the announcement on Wednesday inspired hope among war-weary Nepalis that this may finally be the beginning of the end of a seven-year conflict that has cost more than 8,000 lives and ruined the nation.

"This is a major breakthrough, but there is a big challenge ahead now to make the ceasefire stick and carry on the negotiations," one senior government official told us Thursday. He said the negotiations had been tortuous. "Till the last moment, we knew it could have gone either way." The government conceded to lifting the terrorist label, an international warrant and the bounty for the heads of senior Maoist leaders—all in return for the immediate ceasefire call.

A truce is the first step to build confidence

in negotiations. This ceasefire can't be like last year when executions, extortion and plunder continued nationwide while the talks took place.

"The peace process has already started," Lt Col Pun told us Thursday morning. "I am very optimistic that we will see lasting peace." The ex-Royal Nepal Army helicopter pilot-turned-aviation entrepreneur-turned-politician is suddenly in the limelight as the main architect of the negotiations. He has been credited with making initial contacts with the top Maoist leadership two months ago and mediating between them and the palace. The government has named him chief coordinator in coming negotiations.

The next step will be direct talks between Pun and possibly Babu Ram Bhattarai from the Maoist side to iron out the facilitation procedures. Asked if these negotiations would take place outside Nepal, one senior government official said, "I don't think there is any need. This is our problem and we need to solve this ourselves." Then, the two sides will get down to the nitty-gritty of Maoist demands of a roundtable conference of political forces, constituent assembly elections and an interim government.

"Time for all-out action is now..."

Nepali Times: What are the lessons for us in Nepal from the way African countries have handled the HIV/AIDS epidemic?

Nafis Sadiq: The urgent message to the countries in the region is that the time for all-out action is now while the prevalence of infection is still low and the epidemic can be controlled. South Asia is not yet anywhere near current levels of HIV/AIDS in Africa. It is still mainly confined to the most vulnerable groups—commercial sex workers, IV drug users, men who have sex with men, transport and migrant workers—as well as people who are infected by receiving infected blood or blood products. But it is breaking out of these groups.

The lessons learned from Africa are to take the problem seriously while prevalence levels are still low. You need high-level political leadership to remove stigma and silence, to treat the problem as a development problem not just a health issue, build partnerships with NGOs religious groups and women's organisations, and to take bold actions including access to services for all who need them. South Asian countries can contain HIV/AIDS with actions now. Time is of the essence.

How seriously do you take the US administration threats to cut funds for condom propagation and use?

This is to be taken very seriously. Everyone agrees that abstinence, faithfulness must be promoted, but individuals at high risk should be enabled to protect themselves. As we know, the majority of girls and women have only one partner—90 percent of infected women got the infection from their spouse. So cutting funding for condoms for AIDS prevention will affect the health of large numbers of people including many those who may be infected as a result not of their

own behaviour but that of their partners'. I hope the US, which has been a world leader on reproductive health and rights issues, will recognise these realities and maintain its support for condom programs.

There is still a lot of squeamishness about discussing sexual transmission prevention in our region. In your experience, what is the most effective way to break taboos?

This squeamishness about discussing sexual matters is one of the greatest hindrances to high-level political support. First, countries must acknowledge high risk behaviour exists in our societies. South Asian leaders need to state their objective clearly; that to contain the epidemic there must be education and information for the whole public, starting with the high risk groups. There is no cure and no preventive vaccine. The only way to stop HIV/AIDS from becoming a huge epidemic is by educating and informing people and providing access to services.

There is criticism that combating AIDS gets all the funds, leaving unglamorous diseases which kill more people under-funded. How would you respond?

The reason that HIV/AIDS is getting the attention it does is that it is not just a disease. Look at the African experience. The epidemic has reduced decades of health gains. Botswana's life expectancy which should have been about 67 years has gone down to 43 years. HIV/AIDS can be a major developmental calamity. This is why South Asian countries must act with courage and forthrightness immediately. Our leaders will be judged by the actions they take now to contain the serious problem of HIV/AIDS.



Nafis Sadiq became the UN secretary general's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Asia after serving as the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She is in Kathmandu for next week's high-level South Asian regional conference on AIDS. Nepali Times talked to her about the epidemic.

See also ➡ p4-5, 15



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THE ABSENCE OF WAR IS NOT PEACE

The people did not greet the ceasefire announcement by the Maoists and the government on Wednesday night by spontaneously pouring out on the streets. We've all had our fingers burnt with premature euphoria in this country. We have learnt to be cautious.

But as a new day dawned, and with it the prospect of an end to violence, there was a palpable sense of relief in the bahals, in the sidewalks, the temples and markets. The sun came out after two days of rain, and you could sense the lighter step, see a renewed readiness to smile at strangers again, and almost smell a distant peace in the air.

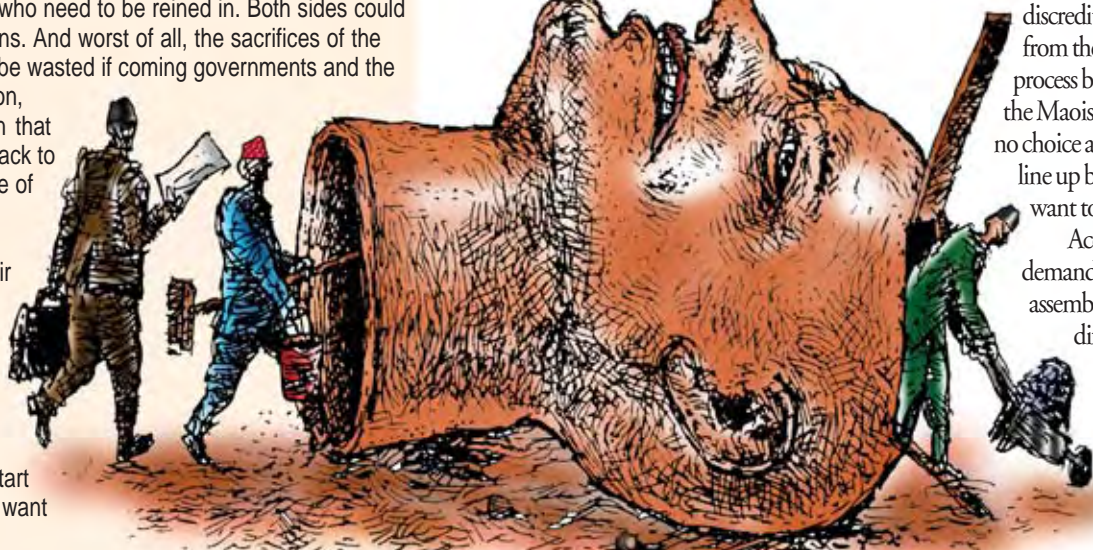
On Martyr's Day, it is in memory of the nearly 8,000 Nepalis who have been killed in the past seven years that we have the responsibility to see this process through. To prove that they did not die in vain, to honour their memory by beginning to rebuild and to restore hope. It was mostly the innocent and good who died. Thousands of people like IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha, a decent human being, a patriot, a man of integrity, and above all, a person who fervently believed in peace. It was when he and his wife and bodyguard were killed last Sunday that even those who did not know him lost hope. Luckily, negotiators who were already embarked on the peace process did not allow the murders to derail it. In fact, by all accounts the Shresthas' murders seems to have added a new sense of urgency to the behind-the-scenes negotiations.

What is different this time is that the Maoists don't seem to be using this as a ruse to buy time to regroup and rearm as they did last year. The political leadership appears to be reacting to internal pressures of a revolution that was going out of control and to the squeeze of regional geopolitics. The Maoists realised that with army's new weapons and logistics this war could drag on for another 25 years and they would be no closer to their goal. On the government side, there was realisation among the generals that not even taking the army's strength to 100,000, adding 25 more helicopters, and ordering new mortars and RPGs was going to bring them any closer to victory.

A ceasefire announcement is the beginning of a process. The hard part now begins. But as the Sri Lanka experience shows, if the ceasefire sticks, the Maoists' main demands for a roundtable meeting, constituent assembly and interim government can be thrashed out on the table.

To be sure, there will be obstacles. The political parties aren't helping any by sulking in the corner and muttering, "How dare they. They never told us." There are the shadowy hardliners in the Maoist movement who need to be reined in. Both sides could become unnecessarily rigid during negotiations. And worst of all, the sacrifices of the Nepali people over the past seven years will be wasted if coming governments and the bureaucracy go back to inefficiency, corruption, mismanagement, politicisation and exclusion that characterised the past. That would bring us back to square one, and to a point where the absence of war will not mean peace.

As we said in this space last week, the political parties now need to come out of their narrow cocoons to help the administration prepare for elections. And let not the media frenzy of the peace process eclipse all the other urgent matters that need attention—delivering basic services, rebuilding and rehabilitation. As Minister Pun told us, "We have to shed the language of the gun, and start addressing the peoples' real needs. We don't want to waste time."



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



An outbreak of peace?

The truce, however fragile, is a respite for Nepalis. The alternative is too horrendous to contemplate.

A breakthrough in negotiations between the king and the Maoists on the eve of Martyrs' Day has opened the doors for a meaningful dialogue between the warring parties. The announcement of ceasefire followed public outrage over the killings on Sunday of IGP of the Armed Police Force, Krishna Mohan Shrestha, his wife and bodyguard.

IGP Shrestha is the highest-ranking government official so far from among those who have laid down their lives for the country. The Maoist insurgency and the counter-insurgency operations by the security forces have claimed nearly 8,000 Nepali lives.

If the ceasefire leads to a lasting solution, the blood of the innocent will not have been spilt in vain. If the truce turns out to be temporary, the consequences of the next phase of the conflict are too horrendous to contemplate. This second round of talks with the Maoists has to succeed. There is no other way.

By agreeing to remove the terrorist tag, withdrawing the red-corner notice from Interpol and cancelling the bounty over the heads of Maoist leaders, the king's nominees have taken a truly bold step. The next logical

move would be to unilaterally accept those demands of the Maoists that do not directly contravene the laws of the land. It can safely be assumed from all available indications that the king has prepared himself for such an eventuality.

Since the Maoists are fighting for a republic, their main clash is with the king. However, they seem to have decided to strike while the iron is hot. Politically, the king is all alone since he has isolated himself from all the mainstream political parties. The Maoists probably hope they can wrest substantial concessions.

Among all the stakeholders of the peace process, the role of the king is the most crucial. He can either seize the moment and make a place for himself in history by opting for fundamental changes in the political structure of the country, or choose to ride the waves by making cosmetic changes in the status quo. It's King Gyanendra's decision, and it will decide the future of the forthcoming dialogue with the Maoists, the future of the country and indeed, the future of the monarchy itself.

The predicament of the mainstream political parties like Nepali Congress, UML, RPP and even the Sadbhavana is unenviable. They have so far been used, ridiculed,

discredited and then sidelined from the conflict resolution process between the monarchy and the Maoists. The choice they face is no choice at all—they now have to line up behind the Maoists if they want to save their political skins.

Accepting the Maoist demand for a constituent assembly shouldn't be very difficult for the Nepali Congress as it has already prepared its supporters for it. Among the possible procedures for constitutional reforms (a constituent

assembly, parliamentary enactment, drafting by an all party expert committee, negotiated settlement between conflicting interest groups, petition to the ruler, direct foreign intervention and a national referendum) an election for a constituent assembly is undoubtedly the most complex. But it also confers greatest political legitimacy on the resulting text.

The legitimisation of the Maoists implies that the UML needs to reinvent itself at its Janakpur Convention. There is no place for two large communist blocs in Nepali politics and UML has to carve itself a niche around *Bahudaliya Janabad* Marxism. The clamour for power within UML has got so bitter that the likelihood of Comrade Madhav Nepal and Comrade Khadga Oli burying their personal differences for the greater good of the party, and the country along with it, seems remote. Unless the younger cadres decide to assert themselves in Janakpur, Nepal's bourgeoisie communists risk being consigned to the dustbins of history.

The RPP and Sadbhavana have realised by now that the benefits of being the "king's party" are ephemeral. A party, by its very definition, belongs to the people. What will be their stand when the government and the insurgents call for an all-party conference? The RPP's recent decision to accept "some kind of a role" for the king has alienated it from other mainstreams, and it would be suicidal for it to accept any further emasculation of the constitution.

The prospect for peace in the country depends upon the choices that these stakeholders make. Meanwhile, all we can do is keep the pressure on all sides to pursue the path of peace without sacrificing democratic pluralism. In a multi-ethnic society, there is no alternative to a system that derives its strength from diversity.

At the end of a hard and bitter winter this truce, however fragile, is a respite for the Nepalis. The people have less to lose than those who have higher stakes. Let's just hope it's not a false spring. ♦

NATION

COMMENT

Even by international standards, the history of communist parties in Nepal shows a fissiparousness that is unsurpassed. It is hard to keep track of where and when the different factions split and went their separate ways. The formation of the UML (United Marxist-Leninist) was the result of a unity drive by Madan Bhandari of the Unity Party with Manmohan Adhikari as chairman.

Both are no more. But the unity they strove for has withstood the test of time, even though there have been rump factions breaking off and reuniting in the intervening years. Credit for this must also go to Madhav Kumar Nepal, who succeeded Madan Bhandari and led the nine-month UML minority government in 1994. Even the UML's critics will admit that this was one period in the past 12 years that Nepal had a relatively clean and effective government.

That government was brought down, and the succeeding years were ones in which we saw the further erosion of morality and ethics in politics. Coalition governments came and went, horse-trading was rife and political patronage was for sale to the highest bidder. The result was bandish, public apathy towards those they had elected and, in the hinterland, the rise of the Maoist insurgency that capitalised on this frustration.

In all this commotion a coalition between the RPP (Chand Faction) and the UML, with Chand as the prime minister and Bamdev Gautam as the Deputy PM managed to undo all the achievements of the nine-month UML government—a coup of sorts. Allegations of corruption in high places in the coalition government tainted the UML partners. A subsequent rift in the UML between factions led by Bamdev Gautam and Madhav Kumar Nepal came to a head on the issue of the ratification of the Mahakali

Treaty with India. Gautam used this issue as the platform to launch his opposition at the 6th National Convention in 1998 at Nepalgunj with the formal split of the the ML faction led by Gautam, who later went into a coalition with the Nepali Congress. But this alliance of convenience was short-lived, and a later UML-Nepali Congress coalition went for general elections in 1997 which the Nepali Congress swept.

The ML was trounced without even a single representation in the lower house. After an extended period of bitterness the ML finally came back to rejoin the UML last year, but the bad blood is just beneath the surface. Had the UML and ML not split, we can be sure that the political course of this nation would have taken a turn for the better.

The last three years have seen the UML as the main opposition in parliament, and its role has been limited to exposing scandals in the ruling party as well as exploiting internal rifts within the Congress.

King Gyanendra's dismissal of the Deuba government, charging it with incompetence, opened up a whole new chapter in Nepali politics. It resulted in a direct and worsening polarisation between the constitutional monarchy and the political parties. After hesitating

briefly, the UML has now embarked on a "national awareness campaign". The mass turnout at these rallies have been good considering the situation, and it has proven wrong those who said that the masses had abandoned the political parties. The last of these rallies was held at Kathmandu on 15 December where the call went out for the king to

bring democracy back on track, but UML leaders fell short of calling for an escalated protest.

Instead, the party issued strong words of warning against "regressive forces" within the palace and against the Maoists. This was to try to buy time to resolve the crisis between the parties and the palace and also to put the UML's own house in order at its 7th Convention in Nepalgunj.

In the run-up to Janakpur, Madhav Kumar Nepal presented a political paper which was unanimously passed by the central committee. But the party's future plans have been eclipsed by a power struggle within the party, with some central level leaders like KP Sharma Oli and Bamdev Gautam trying to settle their old grudges.

They accuse Nepal of playing favourites and want the vacant post of chairman to be filled by the convention. They want to create the post of deputy general secretary and would also like the term of the general secretary to be fixed.

The Nepal faction thinks these reforms would undermine party discipline and authority. The delegates to the national convention numbering 1,200 represent 150,000 card-carrying members of the UML who will decide the future of

by DHAWAL SJB RANA



Janakpur and beyond

The UML needs to grow up and see beyond the immediate personal gain of its leaders.

the party in Janakpur.

Elections for convention delegates have been completed at the district levels, with both factions claiming that they are in the majority. For its part, the UML cadre is jittery and foresees a power struggle in Janakpur which may yet again set the party back.

Unnecessary bitterness and charges are being exchanged, which may lead to a showdown just like at Nepalgunj in 1997 with the losers quitting and splitting the party. Nepal and his supporters have the responsibility of keeping the party intact, while the challengers must learn to accept defeat gracefully and move ahead to deliver their promises to the people.

Nepali politics has been revolving around individual egos and one-upmanship. Our leaders need to grow up and see beyond their immediate personal gain—nothing less than the country's welfare and even survival is at stake. If only the party's leaders could keep their personal agenda and ambitions in check, it could still work. But if the UML splits

again, the Maoists are waiting with open arms to take the cadre away.

The Nepali people have been mis-governed for too long, too many promises have been made and broken, they have suffered this poverty and violence for too long. It is now up to the UML to put the country back on the road to democracy and development. ♦

(Dhawal SJB Rana is the former UML mayor of Nepalgunj.)



RAKESH THAPA

LETTERS

KRISHNA MOHAN SHRESTHA

My name is Pradeep and after reading the obituary for Krishna Mohan Shrestha on your online edition I wanted to write a few words of tribute. This summer, my family and I had the pleasure of having Krishna Mohan as a guest in our house for a few days. Both articulate and humble, sophisticated yet unassuming, fiercely proud but simple in his needs, he was a man with a vision of what Nepal should be. Even in his brief stay with us, my entire family and I were left with the feeling that he alone could change the violent political state of Nepal—that he could curb terrorism, restore peace to the streets and remove fear from people's minds. He had a blueprint for the future and was willing to invest his life and soul into making it a reality. Never before had I seen such determination and

patriotism. He confided that he longed for a day when his job would become obsolete, when he could retire to the beautiful countryside with his family. While his job involved violence, Krishna Mohan was a pacifist who saw force as a last resort rather than a necessary tool.

The tragedy on Ring Road happened a world away, but for me, the blood soaks my own backyard. May the IGP and his wife's death be not in vain. May his spark light the way to a future of peace and progress.

Pradeep, Washington DC



ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Amy Chua's highly over-rated book is reviewed rather uncritically by Daniel Lak ("The worst form of government, except all the others" #129). Actually Chua's book hasn't set the world abuzz as Lak seems to infer. It is seen as a case of academic over-simplification, over-stressing the ethnic point, and being over-pessimistic about democratisation, and under-estimating the post-colonial strengthening of the local elites.

Chua ignores all facts that don't fit her theory of democratic decay. Let us not forget that democratisation also brought out the potency of other social forces—like the middle classes in Thailand and the Philippines, not to mention Taiwan and South Korea. It is democracy that made these the vibrant nations what they are today. These classes got both economic and political power because of democratisation and liberalisation. And, in many instances, they are the fulcrum of reform, forcing more socially conscious elite and more accountable government. You have a politically and economically empowered middle class that is leading reformist political parties, NGOs, media and helping break the

elite stranglehold, if not so successfully in the economic sense, at least the elite hegemony in the ideological sense. For example by promoting the idea of real democracy to include social justice. This is completely glossed over in the book. Chua is also too cynical and her mind is made up not to see the grassroots democracy that is at work, despite the stranglehold of the elite and the market. Chua's book is nothing but typical bourgeois pessimism among the elite about a country's situation which they themselves helped create. Lak is right about one thing though—what is the alternative? Fashionable gloom about "illiberal democracy" is all very well, but in the real world it doesn't help things any.

Sonia Hernandez, email

GLOBALISATION

Your issue #129 featured two articles that dealt with Nepal joining the WTO and globalisation in general ("An alternative to Davos" and "Three views on globalisation"). I was disappointed that within these articles, a very important factor to consider in the fairness of globalisation was completely overlooked except a short phrase from Emma Bonino's

excerpt. She wrote "Globalisation can multiply its benefits only if it manages to defeat its greatest enemies: the resistance of too many political leaders in the North to eliminating barriers to the free circulation of good and peoples..." The free movement of people is indeed one of the greatest enemies of globalisation's benefits. The current situation of the world is not unlike the feudal system practiced in Europe centuries ago. Transnational corporations set up shop in poor countries and employ desperate people at desperate wages. The goods are then sold in wealthy countries at high prices. The profits remain with the wealthy, while the workers have only enough to survive. Just as in the feudal system, the workers work, but don't reap the justified benefits.

Yet, because of visa restrictions, people from poor countries have almost no chance to travel and work in a wealthy country where they would be paid at decent wages, just as a serf had next to no chance of ever becoming a lord. If goods from the West are to arrive in Nepal, how is it fair that Nepal isn't allowed to offer one of its greatest assets to the West—man and woman power?

In my opinion, the issue of work visa restrictions is the hidden flaw in the logic of globalisation as it is conceived of today. Poor countries have a limited array of goods to entice the wealthy countries. Plus, how can a poverty stricken country reasonably trade goods with countries wealthy enough to subsidise and even dump excess goods in poor countries to be sold under the cost production thereby plundering internal markets and damaging the local economy? I believe that the answer is to create and enforce a decent global minimum wage for transnational corporations, and to greatly reduce work visa restrictions. Until a man or woman can look for work freely across borders, or at least for decent wages within their own countries, the trading of goods across borders will only increase the disparity between wealthy and poor nations.

Ralph Turner, Kathmandu

GURKHAS

I recently read with great interest and not a little misgiving, "One victory at a time" (#126) regarding the various court cases currently taking place in London regarding

the Gurkhas. I would ask your readers to be aware of the potential serious damage that could be done to the hitherto exemplary name of the British Gurkhas and to the very close and valuable links that have existed between Nepal and the United Kingdom over nearly two centuries. As an ex-Gurkha myself, I know I speak for many former and current servicemen within the country who are very proud of our links with the British Army.

Although an integral part of the British Army, the Brigade of Gurkhas and we, the Gurkhas, are "different". We have our own Brigade of Gurkhas Standing Instructions (BGSIs), our own Records Office Instructions (ROIs), our own disciplinary code and Dress Regulations. The traditions and reputation of the Brigade of Gurkhas are unparalleled and it saddens me and many other Nepali citizens to think that this may be tarnished. The demise and possible end of this very special and cherished link between our country and the United Kingdom would be a tragedy for us individually and for our country.

In addition, the Gurkha Welfare Appeal set up initially by serving and ex-British Officers and, over

the years, supported by many overseas organisations, has helped so many in Nepal who have fallen victim to natural disasters or poverty and found themselves in need of urgent financial assistance. Then there is the value each year of the "Gurkha connection" to Nepal's economy, currently around Rs 6 billion. It is the fourth largest foreign currency earner after donor aid, tourism and exports.

There are other countries where Nepalis earn salaries and gain no other benefits. The number of Nepalis seeking such employment continues to increase. There are countries like Brunei, Hong Kong and Singapore where Gurkhas are employed in the paramilitary, police forces or security forces, but they are always treated, and I believe rightly so, as a "special case". We simply are not the same as the nationals of the country in which we serve and we should be proud of that fact.

In terms of recruitment into the Brigade of Gurkhas, 22,000 vied for a further 230 vacancies this year. The Gurkhas continue to find this opportunity attractive and the terms and conditions acceptable.

J Basnet, email

PRIVATE CROOKS

In your interview with Badri P Shrestha ("There is enough money to finance development" #127) the finance minister brags correctly about his ability to direct scarce resources of the poverty-stricken government which he inherited towards development. His emphasis on bailing out the dying tourism industry is also commendable. However, let it not be an example of robbing Peter to pay Paul (Nepali version: *sadhu lai sul, chor lai chautara*). What goes on in the netherworld of Nepali industry and finance should be no secret to Shrestha. Doctored balance sheets to raise capital, insider trading, collusion with the regulating authority in bank-rate fixing, inflated cost estimates for bank financing, conflict of interest lending resulting in bad loans—these are all accepted as "au natural". The finance minister should take the advice of the CIAA before injecting the hard-earned earnings of Nepali overseas workers to bail out their robber barons.

"Privatisation" is a fashionable word, but only if the private sector is not a bunch of crooks like it is in Nepal. Let a thousand flowers bloom, but let us learn to

distinguish between who is a flower and who is a weed. So, before rescuing the tourism industry, please try to make sure you are not rescuing the swindlers. Badri, like Arjun in the Gita, should shed his emotion and attachment and be ready to slay even kith and kin to clean up the country. Corruption rests on four pillars: collusion, connivance, cronyism and connection. The Surya Nath and the Lamsal commissions should not stop at ministers, they should scrutinise our private crooks as well.

Gaja Raj, email

CHILDREN FOR SALE

There are thousands of homeless, orphaned and starving children in Nepal, and child adoption is one way to take care of them. I can understand a processing fee of \$2,500 as a valid amount to pay for adoption. But children's organisations in Kathmandu want anywhere up to \$17,000 for a child. I am a Nepali living in the USA and want to help. But this puts adoption beyond my reach. I don't want to buy a child, I want to adopt one. Orphanages and children's homes should give overseas Nepali couples first priority. I have been told by one

government orphanage that if I go through an agency, I can have a baby girl in a few weeks, otherwise my application will be placed at the bottom of the list. What kind of reasoning is this? Obviously adoption is now a big business obeying only the rules of supply and demand. Can your paper help us highlight this unforgivable commercialism?

Kisan Upadhaya, Duke University, USA

WI-FI

Hey ho for wi-fi in Kathmandu, but forget about the middle classes outside of urban Nepal. In places like Solu Khumbu, we're still waiting for the mobile phone signal stations promised so long ago. Is it a corruption problem? Well Bangladesh has had mobile phone service in the hinterland for years and years and ranks, worse than Nepal on the corruption scale. Must be that plain old, lethal, toxic, dysfunctional state of the state.

L Dolma, email

STILL WIRED

After using wireless for well over four months now, I wish I could actually do many of the things that Rajib Subba described in "Cable and Wireless" (#129). The

problem? Houses and buildings in Nepal are the biggest blocks or obstruction to the transmission distance. The wireless PC card and the base station should be able to provide connectivity over a distance of about 100m as per specifications. But in my office I cannot connect from the next floor. The steel-concrete building materials we use are virtual walls that do not allow these frequencies to penetrate and thus the much hyped distance and ease of mobility must be taken with a pinch of salt. It is a great solution for an office environment with many PC's within one large area where one base station can connect upto 50 PCs. Security also is not an issue as it comes with robust encryption technology. And yes, I did check my emails sitting in my garden with a wireless PC card in my laptop—but to that I had to take a loooooong ethernet cable to connect the base station outside my house. Not to mention another loooooong electric extension cord to power up the base station. So much for wireless mobility. Sanjay B Shah, by email

US gag rule hurts population and AIDS work

The United States got everyone started into family planning in Nepal 35 years ago. Now, under pressure from the religious right, Washington has cut funding for condoms, jeopardising Nepal's family planning and anti-AIDS campaign.

HEMLATA RAI

US president George W. Bush's decision to reinstate the "Global Gag Rule" that prevents NGOs from providing abortion-related services, including counselling and referrals, has started affecting projects that aim to improve the reproductive health of Nepalis.

AIDS is going to be the single biggest killer of young Nepalis in the next five years and is spreading

rapidly because of unprotected sex and injecting drug use. Nepal also has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world mainly due to lack of health care and unsafe abortions.

One estimate two years ago showed that at least six Nepali women die every day because of unsafe abortions. There are still hundreds of women in jails serving sentences for abortion, three-fourths of them are illiterate and have never received legal support.

Legalised abortion would make it safer and also help women in prison, but such reforms and

legal services will be jeopardised if American funding dries up.

"We are concerned about US funding," says Wasim Zaman, the Kathmandu-based South Asia director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). "They should be taking the lead, not slowing down. This is not about supporting abortion, it is about population, development and safe motherhood."

UNFPA was hit hard after the US cut its funding during the Reagan years, citing money was used for abortions in China. The Clinton administration reinstated funding, but when George W. Bush came to power the bill was once more blocked in Congress under

pressure from the religious right. Like the UNFPA, the London-based International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), which campaigns for women's reproductive rights all over the world, has also had its US-funding cut off and it has scrapped some of its support for local affiliates.

At the fifth Asia-Pacific Conference on Population and Development in December which was supposed to take stock of progress since the Cairo conference in 1994, the US delegation tried to block two chapters in the resolution dealing with reproductive rights, especially for adolescents because "it would lead to abortions".

Although the US was isolated, it did manage to put pressure on countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka to abstain from the final voting.

Last August, after intense lobbying by health and social activists, Nepal's parliament passed a bill with an overwhelming majority, conditionally legalising abortion under strict consensual and health guidelines.

Now, some of these NGOs face cuts in US funding. The Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) has been supported by the US government for the past 30 years, and had been getting \$430,000 annually till 2001. That support has been cut. In addition, funding from the IPPF suffered a 23 percent cut when the US stopped funding its London headquarters. The cuts

have affected FPAN's contraceptive procurement as well as awareness activities, and the association has also laid off 70 experienced staff and slashed other expenses.

"Nepal is a success story, there is very high awareness about the contraceptive and AIDS-prevention aspects of condoms. Now, all this could go down the drain," warns Nirmal Kumar Bista of FPAN.

Nepali health activists say Washington could face a harsher reaction from the American public if they were told what the US aid pullout is doing to mothers and children around the world. When asked, USAID's health expert Pancha Kumari Manandhar told us: "The US Congress has heard the views of Nepali NGOs, but a policy change is not being considered at this moment."

Pro-choice organisations like Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy are therefore trying to generate public pressure from within the US. "The American people haven't been told about the negative impact Bush's decision has made on family health services and AIDS prevention in countries like Nepal," says FPAN's Bista.

US aid officials based in Kathmandu admit privately that they were embarrassed and worried by their government's stance, but said there wouldn't be a shortage of donors if the US pulled out. Other donors said it was the principle of the thing. "The Europeans are doing a good job, but they shouldn't be asked to fill in," one aid official in Kathmandu told us.

At the Ministry of Health's Family Planning Division, Laxmi



Raj Pathak says there already is a negative impact, but added, "It's not going to affect our policy on safe abortion and contraceptive awareness and distribution."

The US decision has not only upset activists and lobbyists, but has also irked policy makers. Sharat Singh Bhandari who was the outspoken health minister in the Deuba government told us, "We respect the US' right to decide its own policies, but we urge it to take a wider perspective in issues that might have global impact and implications." While minister, Bhandari battled social taboos about discussing sex and was embroiled in controversy for advocating the legalisation of prostitution. He added, "Our present reality demands that women should be given a right to decide what happens to their bodies and how they want to plan their families. We should keep politics out of it." ♦

Bush declares war. On Condoms.

NICHOLAS D KRISTOF in NEW YORK

Three thousand years ago an amorous Egyptian couple (probably libidinous liberals) experimented with a linen pouch, producing the world's first condom. Some right-wingers still haven't gotten over it.

Over the last few years conservative groups in President George Bush's support base have declared war on condoms, in a campaign that is downright weird but that, if successful, could lead to millions of deaths from AIDS around the world.

I first noticed this campaign last year, when I began to get emails from evangelical Christians insisting that condoms have pores about 10 microns in diameter, while the AIDS virus measures only about 0.1 micron. This is junk science (electron microscopes have not found these pores), but the disinformation campaign turns out to be a far-reaching effort to discredit condoms, squelch any mention of them in schools and discourage their use worldwide.

"The only absolutely guaranteed, permanent contraception is castration," one Catholic site suggests helpfully. Hmmm. You first.

Then there are the radio spots in Texas: "Condoms will not protect people from many sexually transmitted diseases." A report by the Human Rights Watch quotes a Texas school official as saying: "We don't discuss condom use, except to say that condoms don't work."

I'm all for abstinence education, and there is some evidence that promoting abstinence helps delay and reduce sexual contacts. But young people have been busily fornicating ever since sex was discovered in 1963 (as the poet Philip Larkin calculated), and disparaging condoms is far more likely to discourage their use than to discourage sex. The upshot will be more gonorrhea and AIDS among young people and many more people dying young.

So far Bush has not fully signed in to the campaign against condoms, but there are alarming signs that he is clambering on board. Last month at an international conference in Bangkok, US officials demanded the deletion of a recommendation for "consistent condom use" to fight AIDS and sexual diseases. So what does this

administration stand for? Inconsistent condom use?

Then there was the condom caper on the web site of the government Centres for Disease Control. A fact sheet on condoms was removed and eventually replaced by one that emphasised that they may not work. "The Bush administration position basically condemns people to death by HIV/AIDS," says Adrienne Germain, president of the International Women's Health Coalition. "And we're talking tens of millions of people."

Evangelical groups do superb work in Africa running clinics for

some of the world's most wretched people—like impoverished AIDS victims. So it is baffling to see these same groups buying into junk science in ways that will lead to more AIDS deaths.

The scientific consensus is simple: Condoms are far from perfect, but they greatly reduce the risk of HIV and gonorrhea for men, and they probably also reduce the risk of other sexual infections, though more studies are needed to prove the case definitely. See, for example, the National Institutes for Health report at <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/dmid/stcds/condomreport.pdf>.

One study by the University of California at Berkeley found condom distribution to be astonishingly cost-effective, costing just \$3.50 per year of life saved. In contrast, anti-retroviral therapy costs almost \$1,050. Yet the US is now donating only 300 million condoms annually, down from about 800 million at the end of the first President Bush's term.

Consider Botswana, which has the highest rate of HIV infection in the world—39 percent of adults. According to a report on condoms by Population Action International, the average man in Botswana gets less than one condom per year from international donors.

In the time it has taken to read this column, 28 people have died of AIDS, including five children. An additional 49 people have become infected. It is imperative that we get over our squeamishness—accept that condoms are flawed but far better than nothing. ♦ (NYT)



"The Bush administration position basically condemns people to death by HIV/AIDS"

HERE AND THERE

Through the Patan mist

A foggy morning is often the ideal time to walk the streets of old Patan. So is a bandh, but no point in advocating more of those exceedingly costly occasions. Hurrying to an early appointment in Mangalbazar, the mist matched the mood on the streets. Gloom and vague forboding was everywhere. Earlier in the week, Krishna Mohan Shrestha of the Armed Police Force had been gunned down on the Ring Road by who the authorities immediately said were Maoists. A woman among those squeezing triggers was pretty clear proof.

Not just the inhabitants of Patan share the fear and paranoia of the local elite who saw one of their own targeted and killed with apparent ease. No, the reaction to the sad events of last Sunday were more complex. First stop—just before Durbar Square—a metalworking shop where intricate Bhairavas, Buddhas and Ganeshas are formed from molten brass and loving craftsmanship. The heat of the forge kept the morning chill at bay. In fact, the man stirring a pot of liquid metal wore a T-shirt and trousers and still wiped sweat from his brow.

Here the conversation was about what the government would do now that the Maoists had apparently shown their weaknesses—on a very personal level—at the heart of state power. "No one deserves to die like that," said metalworker Raj, stirring his silvery brew. "And they shouldn't have killed his wife too. She wasn't commanding police forces and fighting their cadres. I guess that means the end of the peace talks."

I'm not sure his gloom is justified, but it's certainly heartfelt. Like so many ordinary Nepalis, Raj wants peace most of all. But he'd also like to have leaders that paid attention to his concerns and didn't just lurch through the streets in armoured four-wheel drives that are worth more than the lifetime income of his family.

Now the rain is coming down so people hurry past the yoghurt sellers and the vegetable merchants. "Pyaj, kauli, moola," they chant like song



GOTZ HAGEMULLER

lyrics. Most are Maithili men in lungis who work 15 hours every day, peddling endlessly from tarkari bazar to back allies and bahals. A few dozen rupees profit is good.

Mahesh was wheeling his battered bicycle past housewives with no interest in his wares, their day's dal-bhat was already hissing in the pressure cooker inside. He'd heard about the Shresthas' murder on the Radio Nepal news at midday on Sunday. He pursed his lips as he thought about an answer to my question, "What do you think will happen now that the

by DANIEL LAK



Mangalbazar is as much a beleaguered frontline in the conflict as the hills of Rolpa or Rukum.

Maoists seem to be assassinating top people in Kathmandu?

"Why didn't they do it before?" He wonders, "Why did so many like me get killed or captured or forced to leave the village. Nobody should have to die at all, but if they're fighting against the sarkar, then why not attack the sarkari people?" Mahesh could understand why they police officers in the field and soldiers were attacked. "But why abduct students?" I had no answers. I'm a journalist. I have the luxury of just posing the questions.

In Mangalbazar itself, the most miserable day of 2003 so far was well and truly underway. The men crouching in front of the Krishna Mandir next to the road had taken shelter in the temple's top tier. None wanted to speak to the khairi with the questions. A few "ke garne" was the best I could do.

But I can't help but wonder if the people of Patan just reflect the feeling of Nepal as a whole. This tiny, almost perfect urban enclave at the heart of the old city is as much a beleaguered frontline in the conflict as the hills of Rolpa or Rukum. People here know what's going on, and they worry that the tragic deaths of Krishna and Nudup Shrestha and their bodyguard who were killed while walking back from the nearby Bangalamukhi Temple might just leave them as exposed to violence and despair as ever. While the elite hire more armed guards, add more armour to the jeep and build the glass-topped walls to their compounds ever higher. ♦

UK-Nepal: Parliamentary Research and Information Centre (PRINCE)

At DFID, our central focus is on an international commitment to halving the proportion of people in extreme poverty by 2015 – through sustainable development, education, and better management of natural and physical environments.

The Department for International Development (DFID) through its Enabling State Programme is seeking Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from organisations/consortia to advise the Parliament Secretariat of the Kingdom of Nepal with their Parliamentary Research and Information Centre (PRINCE) project. You will be required to establish a research and information service for Parliament, upgrade the services of the existing parliamentary library and provide information, research, documentation and reference services to MPs and other parliamentary users through an IT-equipped information system. The project will also assist in the recruiting and training staff to run the services. Other key activities will include setting up and equipping suitable accommodation (space in the new Parliament Secretariat building has been allotted); specifying and resourcing the new service; and training users.

The project is planned for an estimated ten years. The service will be established within two years, followed by a period of three years for handover and up to five years for technical support and external monitoring

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DFID does not expect that one organisation will be able to fulfil the needs of this project, and thus encourages Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from consortia.

Full details of the project including further information of the full range of skills required and application form are available on the DFID website: www.dfid.gov.uk/Contracts/ContractOpportunities.asp

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DOMESTIC BRIEFS



Snow on Swayambhu

No, it's not what you think. This is the Nepal pavilion constructed at the Hannover World Expo 2000 in Germany which is an exact replica of the Swayambhu Nath temple. Nepali artisans were specially flown to Germany to build the Buddhist-Hindu temple complex using traditional techniques, and without using any modern machinery. The entire complex was recently re-erected near Regensburg in Bavaria, where it was spotted recently blanketed in snow.

Empowering Nepal

Nepali students in Minnesota have set a noble example by contributing towards their motherland at a time of crisis: they raised nearly \$ 2,000 for victims of landslide that left 443 dead and more than 12,000 homeless during the last monsoon.

The cheque was handed over to the Nepal Red Cross Society this week to the mother of 24-year-old Rashmi Bhattachan who is studying in Minnesota. With the help of Empower Nepal Foundation, Rashmi managed to involve six universities in her state with 350 students to organise a cultural program *Hamro Daitwa* (Our Responsibility) during dasain. Many US and international students participated in the fund-raising event. "We were able to spread this message across hence each individual understood the importance of the event and therefore supported it wholeheartedly," says Rashmi. Other Nepali students in California, Washington and Australia also organised similar events to help Nepal Red Cross Society aid the landslide victims.



MIN. BARACHARYA

Stepping in

There was not a dry eye at the funeral of the late IGP of the Armed Police Force Krishna Mohan Shrestha and his wife Nudup Shrestha, ruthlessly gunned down by four armed assassins on the morning of 26 January. Present among grieving relatives, commoners and colleagues who had gathered to pay their respects to this officer and gentleman were AIG of the Armed Police Sahabir Thapa, DIG of the Armed Police Rohit Thapa, IGP Shyam Bhakta Thapa, and DIG of the Armed Police Ravi Thapa. AIG Sahabir Thapa succeeds Shrestha as IGP of the Armed Police Force.

Health over revenue

Tobacco and alcohol might mean plenty of revenue but Dr Upendra Devkota appears unmoved by that particular argument. As Nepal's Health Minister, he is preparing to promulgate a special order to control advertising of tobacco, smoking and alcohol—the major causes of lung and oral cancer. They may bring in revenue but they are harmful substances that affect health and longevity, the minister told the third national meet of ENT specialists in Bharatpur. "Advertising drinking and smoking for the sake of revenue is like killing more people to ensure a higher sale of wood for funeral pyres," he said.

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BIZ NEWS

“Quiet governance revolution”: World Bank

Despite gloom and doom, the World Bank sees some silver linings in the Nepali clouds. It's progress report on the Nepal Country Assistance Strategy released this week says: "Over the past year a quiet governance revolution seems to have begun in Nepal. These changes have been met with strong public support and merit the fullest support of the Bank group." The bank recently upgraded its lending programme for Nepal from the "low case" (\$0-50 million annually in new lending) to the "base case" (around \$100 million or more annually). Among the good signs the bank sees are: the government's efforts to restructure its development budget by dropping low priority projects as part of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, as per the government's "immediate action plan" education and health at the local level was being handed over to community management, the government has resisted pressure from vested interest groups to bring financial sector reforms back on track, there has been a crackdown on corruption and "impressive" public sector appointments.

First from the bottom

The 2002 Human Development Report South Asia published this week by the Mahbub ul Haq Development Centre confirms what we knew all along: South Asia is one of the poorest regions in the world, and among them Nepal is the poorest. Examples: the number of people living below the poverty line in Nepal is 42 percent, the highest among South Asian countries. Although the infant mortality rate in Nepal have gone down dramatically, at 72 deaths per 1,000 live births it is still higher than most other countries in the region. Female illiteracy out of total population of women is 76 percent—by far the highest in South Asia. The ratio of people per doctor is several times worse in Nepal than any other country: 20,000 per doctor. The second worst is Bangladesh with 5,500 people per doctor. And the clincher: with an average lifespan of 59 Nepalis live the shortest lives among South Asians.

SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

Guns n' choppers



Nepal has become a dynamite stick between two boulders. Another Mi-17 being unloaded from a Russian transporter in Kathmandu this week.

For a country that continues to pay the price of hasty compromises palmed off as historic change, the ongoing battle of wills may have some redeeming value. There are clear traces of relief in each combatant camp that a fight to the finish has finally begun. Consider some of our current contradictions. Nepalis face the awkwardness of having to accept the only party that has attempted regicide—twice—as the staunchest defender of the monarchy (OK, OK, they never targeted a titular head of state). The CPN-UML remains the fiercest opponent of a constituent assembly, the easiest route to the republic most of us believe it ultimately aspires for.

The two parties wearing freedom in their full names—Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Nepali Congress (Democratic)—are fighting the hardest to ward off the regressive label. The Maoists, who have manipulated fissures in most mainstream parties all these years, are caught between their commitment to joint action to preserve the gains of 1990 and a perpetual readiness to hold talks with the real possessors of power. The palace finds itself being coerced to accept a purely ceremonial role by the same forces that have conferred on it the status of a political power centre.

These anomalies have been amplified in the post-9/11 ambience. The US-led war on terrorism, to be sure, has increased the importance of democracy in the armoury of idealism. On the battlefield, though, the commanders are forced to fight radicalism by

forging closer ties with some of the same illiberal regimes that continue to breed it.

To Western eyes, the economics of extremism puts Nepal in the league of Georgia, the Philippines and Yemen. The conventional wisdom is that while poverty doesn't cause terrorism, it can lead to hopelessness and despair in states where governments fail to fulfil the basic needs of the people. Because of the realisation that such nations easily become havens for terror, "defensive imperialism" has ceased to be the oxymoron many of us thought it was.

Nepal also embodies the unfinished business of the Cold War. Those who dismissed the 'people's war' in its nascent as an ephemeral legacy of Cambodia and Peru still can't detect what's behind the diffusion. Left International is banking on Prachanda's Path to resume the march of history Francis Fukuyama so famously ended. History, however, comes with its own histrionics. Comrade Badal wasn't shooting from the hip when he described Nepal as a load of dynamite between two boulders. Civil war wasn't a purely internal affair even when national sovereignty was sacrosanct. With communist internationalism having been edged out by global capitalism, great powers are more apt to intervene in domestic conflicts to protect their international interests.

Our political discourse needs something more creative than the democracy-is-in-danger refrain. And more so, when the World Bank decides to lift our lending status from low to base case. The

bank is categorical in its report card: "Over the past year or so, despite the continued political turmoil, the reform efforts—largely led by technocrats—seems to have gained momentum and resolve." Kangresis and comrades are correct in counselling a newly assertive palace not to read too much into the accolade. Where they err is in continuing to isolate Sher Bahadur Deuba and his teammates who presided over the "quiet governance revolution" the bank lauds. (For the record, Ram Sharan Mahat who as finance minister entertained donors with an improvised prance after last year's Nepal Development Forum, ditched Deuba the day after the premier dissolved parliament. How does he feel today?)

In a sense, Nepal has reverted to the months between Satra Sal, when parliament was abolished and political parties were outlawed, and Unnais Sal, when the panchayat system was formally enshrined in the constitution. Remember how the exiled Nepali Congress abruptly called off its insurrection on the prodding of its Indian hosts. The real catalyst, though, was Nepal's northern neighbour, which scored a decisive victory in the Sino-Indian war of 1962, changing the regional power equation.

Many who tend to ignore the geo-strategic core of Nepali politics do so because it's so perplexing. But these are shadowy times where every shade and snap has a meaning, and presents an opportunity.

A word of caution: In our righteousness race, let's be sure we really know where the finishing line is. We don't want to end up having to vote for a constituent assembly every three years, do we? ♦

ECONOMY

INTERVIEW

“We can become number one.”



Yoshio Ishizaka, executive vice president of Toyota, was in Nepal recently to promote the company, inaugurate a new venture in the capital and to show his company's concern for the environment. Excerpts of his talk with Nepali Times:

no material for labour. We were restricted to making lunch boxes and trucks. But then the economy bounced back and our growth paralleled the rise of the Japanese economy

What has been your company's response to climate change due to the greenhouse effect?
The Japanese government has already endorsed the Kyoto Protocol. Of course, we have to wait for the US to join. It is very important to preserve nature otherwise, in a 100 years time the problem will get out of hand. Preserving the environment is very important to us. This year I was asked to go to the World Economic Forum Conference at Davos to represent Toyota and attend the automobile governors forum representing the company. There we discussed a sustainable society for the future.

What are some of the specific programs you discussed there?
We are developing environment friendly vehicles. The first one is a Toyota Hybrid car. The Hybrid has a gasoline motor. It is marketed worldwide. It is very well known among the Japanese public and the Americans. The ultimate eco-cars are called fuel-saving vehicles and we recently launched them in Japan and the US. We are frontrunners in environmental technology. Today, Toyota is the number one in hybrid car technology in the world.
At the same time, we have a special project to grow trees in Australia, where we have a farm. It is a long-term project in order to reduce fuel emission gases. We have to do positive things. In Indonesia we grow potatoes that can be used as bases for plastic. Of course it's organic. This means after the car component has outgrown it's usefulness, it is biodegradable. Normal plastic has to be burnt, thrown or recycled. Ours is a bio-technological plant. Very soon we are going to adopt it as automobile material.

So, you believe the automobile industry still has a future?
There are so many people who do not necessarily receive the benefit of driving cars. In advanced countries, there is one car for two buses on the road. Our aim is to increase automobile penetration in every country where we do business.

Why did Toyota enter Formula 1 racing?
That has two purposes. One is to explore our technology in terms of engine and chassis development. Motor sport is one extreme of the motor company where we can test-run many things, especially the speed, chassis and engine development, and aerodynamics. Secondly this enhances our image. It's a pleasure for people to watch motor sports. They are the ones who appreciate driving cars with high power.

A lot of car companies are merging. Is that going to happen to Toyota, too?
At this stage, there are no such plans. We can stand on our own. Of course Daihatsu and Hino are our two subsidiaries. We, the Toyota group, can stand our own in the worldwide business, there is no need to merge with anyone else.

Do you think it can sustain brand loyalty?
Definitely. We would like to have 15 percent of the worldwide market share in automobiles. Currently we have around 10 percent. We aim to see a 15 percent growth starting from 2010. Probably then we can beat GM and Ford to become number one.



THE WORLD BANK
NEPAL OFFICE

REQUIRES
Consultant Education Specialist

Background

The Education sector unit in the Human Development Department in the South Asia Region is responsible for development of lending and supervision of activities/operations, policy advice and sector work. Over the next several years, analytical work in education and the education portfolio will be expanding in response to efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals and Education-for-All targets, and to adjust to a changing economic and social environment.

In response to this demand, SASHD is seeking an Education Specialist – Short Term Consultant to assist with managing existing operations and developing new ones. The duration of the assignment may be up to 190 days. The consultant would work with professionals in Washington and the Nepal Country Office.

The person selected for this position will begin working immediately on supervision and preparation of investment projects. The job will require experience in (i) planning and management of school/university education or other relevant management experience; (ii) program preparation and implementation, and donor relations; (iii) education finance/economics (iii) identifying and analyzing institutional constraints; and (iv) operations of the World Bank or other international agencies.

The position is in the Nepal Country Office. The assignment may involve extensive field trips. We prefer that the selected candidate be prepared to begin working at least by April 1, 2003.

Duties and Accountabilities

The areas of primary responsibility are as follows:

- Operations: Supervision of education sector operations and assisting the team with developing follow-on programs.
- Non-Lending Services: Participate in missions to provide specialized technical inputs and guidance to government counterparts. Assist in reaching consensus through participatory methods including consultations with a wide variety of stakeholders. Actively work to improve the monitoring and evaluation of sectoral activities.
- Partnerships: Work constructively with other development partners in the country.

In performing these roles, the Education Consultant will interact with counterparts in government and with a variety of international and other partner organizations; with Bank colleagues and managers of the HD sector. The selected candidate will report to the Education Sector Manager and will be expected to work in close collaboration with the other members of the HD Team.

Selection Criteria :

To be successful the Education Consultant should have the following attributes:

- Education: Advanced academic degree in education, economics or other field with experience in education sector
- Skills/Experience: A minimum of 5 years of relevant experience is required. Demonstrated knowledge of and experience in solving education sector issues. Experience in operations of the World Bank or other relevant international agencies.
- Teamwork: Success in working in teams both as a team member and as a team leader.
- Conceptual and Analytic Skills: A creative, sharp intelligence that can conceptualize and demonstrate in a tangible and understandable way and through a variety of methods how appropriate policy and investment reforms in education can assist clients to achieve their developmental goals more effectively.
- Communication: Excellent presentational and writing skills are essential.
- Excellent interpersonal skills: Capacity to interact effectively with a range of stakeholders within and outside the Bank.

The World Bank is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate with respect to gender, religion, ethnic origin or caste. Female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply. Applicants should apply in writing, with names and addresses of three references and a sample of recent written work, by February 28, 2003 to :

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On the warpath

PERTH - With the deployment of Australian troops for a war against Iraq, Prime Minister John Howard is ignoring the majority of Australians who oppose the country's involvement in any military action that does not have UN backing. A *Sydney Morning Herald* poll found just six percent of Australians supported involvement in a strike on Iraq without UN endorsement.

Australia became the first country, apart from the US and Britain, to begin deploying troops to the Gulf, with the departure from Sydney Harbour of the transport vessel HMAS Kanimbla carrying 350 sailors and extensive military resources such as army landing crafts, an air defence detachment and a specialist explosives team.

Last year Howard said his government would commit troops to a US-led first strike on Iraq only if it was "completely satisfied that it was in the national interest to do so". Defence Minister Robert Hill defended the deployment decision, saying Australia was joining other countries in applying pressure on Saddam Hussein. But *Australian Financial Review's* defence writer Geoffrey Barker said the size of potential deployments are clear indications Canberra is prepared to fight in Iraq. (IPS)

Restoring ties

WASHINGTON - President Bush's administration moved closer toward normalising military ties with the Indonesian military (TNI), which it hopes will be a key ally in its 'war against terrorism' in South-east Asia. The US claims that Indonesia, with the world's greatest Muslim population, remains a key recruiting ground and possible safe haven for al-Qaeda and its sympathisers, a notion that was bolstered by last October's terrorist attack on a Bali nightclub.

The Senate voted to defeat an amendment that would have barred funding for enrolling Indonesians in Washington's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program until it cooperates fully in an investigation into the killing of two US teachers in West Papua last summer. The administration's eagerness to restore military aid and training to Indonesia—first restricted in 1991 after a well-publicised massacre in East Timor, and then cut off entirely in 1999 when TNI-backed militias ransacked the former Portuguese colony—has made it a top foreign-policy priority since 11 September.

Human rights groups oppose renewing military ties with the TNI, widely considered an abusive and corrupt national military institution. Since even before the military coup d'état by former President Soeharto in 1964, the armed forces have dominated the state apparatus. (IPS)

Year of the worm

LONDON - Computer users will be plagued with a host of new viruses this year, particularly worms deployed into instant messaging systems, predicts a senior technology consultant with UK-based Sophos.

One of these brought down internet services throughout Asia earlier this week by shutting down servers by overloading them with messages. Services returned to near-normal Wednesday, but a new attack is feared over the weekend.

"Virus writers are most interested in creating the next super Windows worm, spread by e-mail or instant messaging, as these mass-mailing viruses carry the greatest impact," says Graham Cluley. "We expect more executable e-mail-aware worms this year, while more viruses are written which use instant messaging services." Sophos also expects to see an increase in the number of so-called "Backdoor Trojans," which can open up holes in operating systems so that crackers can control them from a remote location.

Windows users are particularly at risk, as nine out of 10 of last year's top viruses were spread via e-mail on Windows platforms, the most prolific being the Klez worm. So far, PDAs and mobile phones have remained largely free of virus problems, says Cluley. "There is no indication yet that we will see an avalanche of new viruses affecting mobile devices—virus writers are not interested in targeting the mobile phone until it becomes more developed and has a bigger, common platform."



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COMMENT

Discussing vegetarianism with cannibals

by YULIYA TYMOSHENKO



Too late to talk about morality in politics?

Moral principles and moral obligations in today's political and economical realm have undoubtedly gone astray, unashamedly displaced by the interests of profit and power.

The implications are clear. In today's world, "order" reflects a balance of interests that is maintained mainly by force—be it military or financial. But something other than this "order of the barracks" is possible. Think of it as the order of the church choir, where individual members cooperate on the basis of a shared culture and values.

One reason for the complete absence of values in "power politics" nowadays is that leaders get away with speaking words whose true meaning they leave out of their policies. Moreover, secular spiritual leaders like Gandhi, Schweitzer and King have vanished, annihilated it seems by our new fetishes—success, expediency, gain, and special interests.

Of course, the so-called civilized world never managed to create a living utopia. Efforts to do so usually ended disastrously. As someone born in the old Soviet Union, I know firsthand the despair and brutality of such attempts.

This does not mean that all efforts to build a more moral world are doomed. Having survived an age of extreme ideologies, such as capitalism,

communism, and, recently, market fundamentalism, most people no longer seek answers in ideological clichés and the driving, purifying force of political certainty. Forced harmonisation is dead, which opens the door to making new voluntary forms of social harmony possible.

Let me suggest five steps necessary to begin to bring this about. The first calls for the world to deem as utterly unacceptable state violence that seeks to impose conformity and discipline. Such violence is unjust on its face because it suppresses and intimidates both body and spirit. To achieve this end,

however, the state must be stripped of its ability to impose divisive dogmas, traditions and stereotypes.

That can happen only if a carefully crafted system of "checks and balances" is established, in which powerful organised interests—states, above all—are restrained in their efforts at dominance. Not only political forces need to be checked. In the rush to concentrate wealth, for example, majority owners of corporations must not be allowed to harm the interests of minority shareholders, who as a rule are honest common citizens.

This leads me to my second reform priority: a systemic

separation of state power and capital. Even in long-established democracies, candidates for elective office are not evaluated according to their wisdom and leadership, but according to the size of their campaign war chests. Acquiring government power through possession of capital—and converting it into unjust economic rents—must be curtailed.

Can such a boundary between power and capital be set? Yes. I say this as someone who created significant capital and, having done so, changed her occupation in order to cultivate morality in politics. Laws can make the separation of capital and

by YULIYA TYMOSHENKO

Discussing vegetarianism with cannibals

political power transparent for all to see. But the will to achieve this division is, sadly, absent among most people in power.

Related to this, it is necessary to separate mass media from both power and the interests of capital. In Europe, America, and Japan, media ownership is increasingly concentrated, which rightly worries citizens in these countries, particularly when media owners move from forming opinion to forming governments. How much more worrying, then, is such concentrated ownership in new democracies and developing countries, where the check of civil society is mostly absent?

All these reforms presuppose an independent judiciary. The autonomy of judges must be assured, which requires that their character is such that people trust their decisions. In states where justice is bought by the rich and powerful, this may be impossible, but individual judges can and do stand up to power. All citizens should support such judicial stalwarts, for their example can refashion an entire justice system.

In essence, creating a more moral political order requires the removal of money as the decisive factor in politics. Where money rules, some citizens become depressed and apathetic, others become cruel and heartless, and children

learn aggressive behavior. Money should not divide people into political haves and have-nots, or states into successes and failures. Gradually and persistently, the fundamentalism of money must be eliminated.

Of course my proposed "transformations" may sound too good to be possible. In defense I wish to cite the great Harvard philosopher John Rawls, who died recently. Theory, no matter how elegant, Rawls argued, should be dismissed or revised when proven untrue. The corollary to this is that institutions and even world orders—no matter how efficient and successful—must be reformed if they are unjust.

Perhaps only someone who comes from one of the post-Soviet states can conceive of politics in terms of original principles in the manner of Rawls. Our newborn states were given the opportunity to create moral political systems on the ruins of a "god that failed." The struggle to do so has been mighty, but despite our travails—and our poverty—I believe that my country has the strength to contribute creatively to this endeavour. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

(Yuliya Tymoshenko is a former deputy prime minister of Ukraine and now a leader of the political opposition to President Leonid Kuchma. She has survived several assassination attempts.)

by PRAFUL BIDWAI



contest

has been reshaped by religious extremism, especially in India. Post-11 September there has been growing frustration among Hindu extremists that the United States is not lending its full weight to India in its fight against "cross-border terrorism".

Religious extremists in Pakistan, thus far on the political margin, increased their vote by 50 percent in the October elections—largely because of the US military intervention in Afghanistan, seen as "anti-Islamic". Should the US attack Iraq, Pakistani extremists will get stronger.

India-Pakistan rivalry is thrust to even higher levels by their nuclear and missile arms races. India tested missiles three times in the past fortnight. Pakistan and India have set up or strengthened Nuclear Command Authorities and further hardened their nuclear doctrines.

India has taken the lead by signing a huge \$3 billion deal with Russia to lease four long-range nuclear bombers and two nuclear-capable submarines.

The massive deal will dramatically improve New Delhi's ability to deliver nuclear weapons. The four Tu22 long-range aircraft are capable of dropping nuclear bombs on China. The nuclear-propelled Akula class submarines can deliver nuclear warheads with a major element of surprise.

As India and Pakistan get sucked into the vortex of a terrible nuclear arms race, there are few domestic forces powerful enough to pull them back from the brink. The situation is a case fit for international intervention and mediation. But to get the two rivals to negotiate reduction of hostility and normalise relations, such intervention will have to be even-handed, balanced and multilateral.

The US has immense leverage over India and Pakistan, but its effectiveness would be limited by its short-term interests. In any case, it is preoccupied with Iraq, Palestine and Korea. A better alternative would be an initiative by a truly global forum or one based in the South, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, or an Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Japan-China-plus grouping that can exercise diplomatic-moral pressure upon the South Asian rivals. Such intervention, usefully supplemented by the European Union, has a far higher chance of success than any other. The alternative to that may be a catastrophe. ♦ (IPS)

(Praful Bidwai is a senior Indian writer, and author of the book, *South Asia on a Short Fuse, Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament*.)

COMMENT

War doesn't make economic sense

by JOSEPH E STIGLITZ



War is widely thought to be linked to economic good times. World War II is often said to have brought the world out of the Great Depression, and war has since enhanced its reputation as a spur to economic growth. Some even suggest that capitalism needs wars, that without them, recession would always lurk on the horizon.

Today, we know that these propositions are nonsense. The 1990s boom showed that peace is economically far better than war. The Gulf War of 1991 demonstrated that wars can actually be bad for an economy. That conflict contributed mightily to the onset of the recession of 1991 (which, it should be remembered, was probably the key factor in denying the first President Bush re-election in 1992).

The current situation is far more akin to the Gulf War than to wars that may have contributed to economic growth. Indeed, the economic effects of a second war against Iraq would probably be far more adverse. WWII called for total mobilisation, and it was that total mobilisation, requiring a country's total resources, that wiped out unemployment. Total war means total employment.

By contrast, the direct costs of a military attack on Saddam Hussein's regime will be minuscule in terms of total US government spending. Most analysts put the total costs of the war at less than 0.1 percent of GDP, the highest at 0.2 percent of GDP. Much of that, moreover, includes the usage of munitions that already exist, implying that little or no stimulus will be provided to today's economy.

The Bush administration's (admittedly wavering) commitment to fiscal prudence means that much, perhaps most, of the war costs will be offset by expenditure cuts elsewhere. Investments in education, health, research, and the environment will almost inevitably be crowded out. Accordingly, war will be unambiguously bad in terms of what really counts: the standard of living of ordinary people.

There is also the uncertainty factor. Of course, resolving uncertainty is no reason to invade Iraq prematurely, for the costs of any war are high, and are not to be measured only, or primarily, in economic terms. Innocent lives will be lost—possibly far more than were lost on September 11, 2001. But the wait for war adds to uncertainties that already weigh on the American, and the global, economy:

- uncertainties arising from America's looming fiscal deficit, due to macroeconomic mismanagement and a tax cut that the country cannot afford;
- uncertainties arising from the unfinished 'war on terrorism';
- uncertainties associated with the massive corporate accounting and banking scandals, and the Bush Administration's half-hearted efforts at reform, as a result of which no one knows what America's corporations are worth;

● uncertainties connected to America's massive trade deficit. Will foreigners be willing to continue to lend to the US, with all of its problems, at a rate in excess of a billion dollars a day?

● Uncertainties associated with Europe's stability pact. Will it survive, and will it be good for Europe if it does?

● Finally, the uncertainties associated with Japan: will it at long last fix its banking system, and if it does, how negative will be the short-term impact? Some suggest that the US may be going to war to maintain steady oil supplies, or to advance its oil interests. Few can doubt the influence that oil interests have on President Bush—witness the administration's energy policy, with its emphasis on expanding oil production rather than conservation. But even from the perspective of oil interests, war against Iraq is a risky venture: not only is the impact on price, and therefore on oil company prices, highly uncertain, but other oil producers, including Russian and European interests, will not easily be ignored.

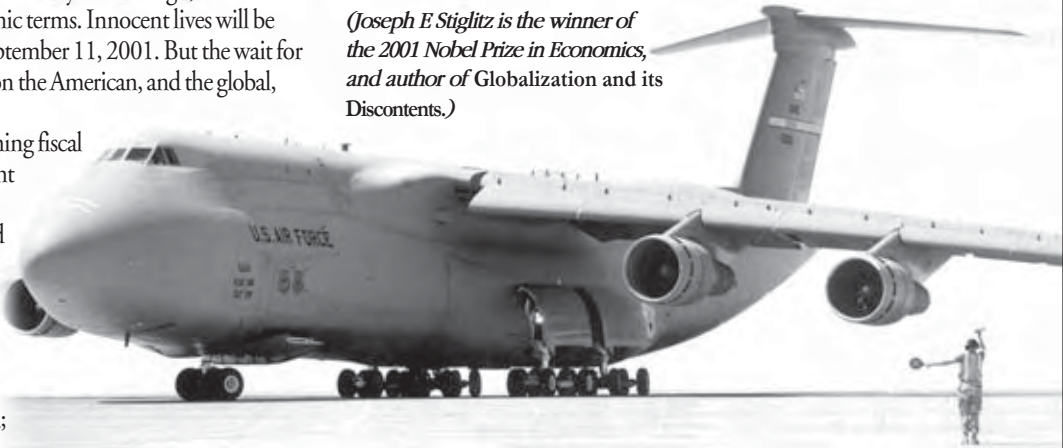
Indeed, should the US go to war, no one can predict the effect on oil supplies. A peaceful, democratic Iraqi regime could be established. Desperate for funds for reconstruction, that new regime could sell large amounts of oil, lowering global oil prices. Domestic US oil producers, as well as those in allied countries, such as Mexico and Russia, would be devastated, though users of oil around the world would benefit enormously.

Or the turmoil throughout the Muslim world could lead to disruptions of oil supplies, with high prices the result. This will please oil producers in other parts of the world, but will have enormously adverse consequences for the global economy, akin to those resulting from the oil price hikes in 1973.

Whichever way one looks at it, the economic effects of war with Iraq will not be good. Markets loathe uncertainty and volatility. War, and anticipation of war, bring both. We should be prepared for them. ♦

(© Project Syndicate)

(Joseph E Stiglitz is the winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics, and author of *Globalization and its Discontents*.)



Muzzling the media

KUALA LUMPUR - Two of the most sensitive issues in Malaysia—race issues and press freedom—combined to ignite last week's police raid on an independent internet newspaper and has turned it into a political controversy. Activists, citizens, all the opposition parties and regional and international press groups have spoken out against the raid of malayskini.com and the seizure of its computers.

The controversy began after the editors refused to reveal the author of what the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) called a "seditious" letter that said special benefits given to Malays for more than three decades are "pernicious politics of privilege" that worked against the other ethnic groups like the Chinese and Indian Malaysians.

Public discussions of race is a touchy subject with the Malaysian government who say inflammatory remarks about race have no space in a multicultural country, where it may create dissension. Malaysiakini has been able to publish independent news different from government-dominated media because the Internet is not controlled by press control laws and does not need a publishing licence.

The Bangkok-based South-east Asian Press Alliance called this police action "a crude attempt" to muzzle independent media. (IPS)

'Resettlers' woes

WASHINGTON - The resettlement of hundreds of thousands of people dislocated by China's controversial Three Gorges Dam project has been marked by inadequate compensation, serious abuses of human rights and widespread corruption, says a report released this week by California-based International Rivers Network (IRN).

The Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydroelectric power project, will displace more than 1.2 million people. The reservoir is scheduled to begin rising in April, reaching a depth of 135m by June and stretching 500km upstream to Chongqing, slated to be the industrial centre of inland China. It is expected to provide power to tens of millions of households, make the river more navigable and control flooding.

Compensation to 'resettlers' has fallen short of the replacement cost. New housing costs far more than what they were offered, the report says. Public protests have led to police using "excessive force" against local demonstrators and countless individuals have been thrown in jail or prison. Those who refuse to leave their homes, called "nail households", have been forcibly removed by security officers. The IRN reports in many cases, they have been beaten and their homes burnt down by police. (IPS)

Tougher laws

TOKYO - Special legal weapons and alternative protection measures are needed to combat gross human rights abuses against undocumented foreign women lured into Japan's sex industry, experts said at a recently concluded Asia Foundation and International Labour Organisation seminar. Japanese criminal laws prohibits trafficking of persons from Japan to another country but not vice-versa. The most vulnerable are those without visas who become victims of unscrupulous brokers and gangsters who employ them.

The Justice Ministry reports as of January 2002, there are around 224,067 overstayers in Japan, of which 105,945 are women. More than 46 percent of these women work as bar hostesses, followed by waitresses and factory workers. They are beaten regularly, have exorbitant debt bondage of up to \$50,000 that they are forced to pay back, 24-hour surveillance, no salaries and service up to 15 clients a day.

Slack laws have allowed criminals to only pay light fines when arrested. Experts concluded Japan should institute a proper system for the issuance of legal visas and the provision of health and mental care for migrant labourers. Social counsellors stressed the importance of psychological and spiritual support for victims of abuse in Japan. (IPS)

Clean air initiative

DHAKA - Nearly a month after Bangladesh phased out polluting three-wheelers from the capital's busy streets, residents and urban planners are finding out that green initiatives take deep root only if other pieces of the puzzle—better transportation networks, more people-friendly cities—are in place.

It took a year until December 2002 for the government to phase out 40,000 to 80,000 three-wheelers or "baby taxis", popularly used transport with two-stroke engines blamed for causing the bulk of vehicular pollution, from this city of 10 million people.

The initial gains from this step, coming after the 1999 enforcement on lead-free petrol and the introduction of compressed natural gas (CNG) and four-stroke machines, are already being felt. The environment department estimates that there has been at least a 25 percent drop in harmful minute particles in the air. The government is encouraging conversion to CNG, importing CNG-run buses, and barring old vehicles from the streets.

Green initiatives are harder to sustain when commuters complain about not enough replacements for the three-wheelers. For many, this has meant longer travel times, circuitous trips, rising costs and another headache—traffic jams that result in engines dirtying the air. (IPS)

Murders most foul



Special Editorial in *Kantipur*, 27 January

Armed Maoists murdered Krishna Mohan Shrestha, head of the Armed Police Force, his wife Nudup Shrestha who was a teacher at Lincoln School and their security guard Surya Regmi. The murders were executed in an extremely cowardly manner. The Maoists may feel they have taken a great leap towards their revolutionary goals, but this is a major mistake. In reality, the results of the murders will be unfortunate for both the nation and the Maoists themselves. Also, if the government, political parties and pro-democracy powers do not realise the threat these murders pose and continue to close their eyes to reality, then the consequences will be dangerous.

The murders have now made it easier for the international community to list the Maoists as a terrorist organisation. It has also increased the possibility of Nepal becoming a market for foreign arms. While the country has been compelled to divert development funds towards security concerns, the murders have proved that the Maoist leadership, despite their professed interest in peace, have once again violated that trust. The bullets that killed the Shresthas and their bodyguard has silenced the demands to lift the terrorist label from the Maoists.

Do the Maoists want to bring foreign powers into the country and end the very existence of the nation? Its future looks uncertain, and those in power are uncertain about how to react to these assassinations. The increasing differences between the king and parties, who like to call themselves democratic, have encouraged the Maoists. The division among the pro-democratic parties and their weaknesses will further enable the Maoists to forge ahead with their principle of divide and destroy. Attempts to restore peace will remain nothing but a slogan. The king and democratic powers need to immediately patch their differences. If the murder of the Shresthas can bring the two together, there is a possibility that this tragedy will have at least one small positive outcome.

The murders of Nudup Shrestha and her husband are not symbols of a successful revolution. They are murders plain and simple. This is a burning example of violence dominating the intellect. What else can be made of incidents when the gun is trained against children, students and teachers?

It would be an error for the government to retaliate in kind, to be like the Maoists whose intellect has been undermined by violence. It is the responsibility of the state to solve the nation's overall situation in a suitable manner. Again, unless the king and political parties ensure a government with maximum participation, the uncertainty and anarchy plaguing the country will continue. That is the moral of the story.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"If a young woman has the right to have sex, it is her responsibility to use available contraceptives. It is everyone's duty to guide young people by providing them information; whether they follow through is their responsibility.

- Dr Bhola Rijal, gynaecologist in *Rajdhani*, 26 January



Car sign: Joint movement
Balloon: Lift Please...!
Surya Bahadur Thapa: RPP
Lokendra Bahadur Chand: PM

रस्येससडम दैनिक *Spacetime*, 29 January

Awesome

Mulyankan, #103

An extract from an interview with Maoist supremo Prachanda:



Obviously we favour a political dialogue for a forward-looking solution to avoid the possibility of a civil war. But if forces want to crush the people's war by using dialogue as a pretext, then we will not let that happen. Making the people sovereign in the real sense can be the only solution to the present problem.

Narayan Singh Pun

Rajdhani, 30 January

राजधानी

Lt Colonel Narayan Singh Pun left the Royal Nepalese Army to float his own chopper company, Kamali Airways. The Nepali Congress MP and Minister later began his own political outfit, the Nepal Samata Party. As Minister for Physical Works and Planning in the Chand government, Pun came into the limelight for his role in bringing the rebels to the negotiating table. Excerpts of an interview:

We still stick to our old stand about a peace dialogue and a political solution to the problem. Everyone is aware that we attempted a dialogue with the then Deuba government based on our 40-point demand prior to initiating the historical 'people's war'. Instead the government inflicted state-terror.

Principally, we were never against dialogue. Last year we observed a ceasefire for three months and sat down for a dialogue but the government took advantage of our flexibility and tried to stage a drama that could never reach a political consensus and tried to crush the people's war. We retaliated and reached where we are today. The present government says that it is open for dialogue. We are positive about talks, and have made this public. But the state has not stopped killing people, therefore, we have not stopped our resistance.

We believe the people will not be satisfied with the achievement of the 1990 movement. We have to further empower them. The initial steps towards that end are our demands for an interim government and the election of a constituent assembly. We don't see any reason why our demands should be opposed. We are very surprised by the statement of some of the UML leaders. It shows they don't have faith in the intelligence of the great Nepali people to draft a suitable constitution for themselves.

Talks will actually be held under the third phase. The government, political parties and representatives from civil society will take part. It is something like the roundtable conference proposed by the Maoists. The conference will try to find solutions to all problems.

Is the government ready to release Maoist detainees?
There are no problems that can't be resolved if we have an understanding. We are ready to release the detainees and it's not a big deal.

How confident are you regarding the outcome?
It doesn't matter whether I am personally convinced about a positive outcome or not. The talks are compulsory for all Nepalis in the current situation. There is no alternative. We are ready to pay any price but will not allow the peace talks to fail.

When will peace negotiations start with the Maoists?

The process of dialogue will start from Thursday. A lot of homework has already been done in this regard. His Majesty's Government has assigned the role of convener of the negotiation committee to me. This committee will be expanded according to circumstances.

What preparations have been made so far?

We have completed the tasks under the first phase. The government and Maoists have agreed to hold negotiations. Now the government will take the initiative to mobilise the political parties, civil society and intellectuals, and unify the whole country in favour of talks. We have already initiated processes in that direction.

When will the talks actually start?



"Nepal needs an environment of trust for the government and rebels to negotiate. I have noticed the government has paid special attention in this direction. As a close neighbour, China has been closely watching the internal developments in Nepal."

Responding to a question on the US military presence in Nepal for training activities, the Chinese envoy smiled and said it was up to Nepal. "It's good to exchange one's experiences but the movement of huge troops is not considered good in the international arena," he said.

The ambassador also said King Gyanendra's recent visit to China had added new dimensions in bilateral relations. During the talks, he repeatedly insisted that Nepali rebels who were indulging in violence were not true Maoists. "There is no relationship at all between their activities and Mao thought," he declared.

Death of innocents

Annapurna Post, 26 January
Ujjwal Neupane

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

Binod Mainali, a 34-year-old teacher from Nuwakot, has been missing since 28 October. He was on his way to the district education office. His father, Phatta Prasad Mainali is not only worried about his son but is also extremely concerned about the situation that will arise from the death of so many innocents.

Nirjung KC of Likhu Nuwakot has been confined to his room for more than a year as he recovers slowly from Maoist inflicted injuries. They brutally broke his arms and legs. "You can't even get justice in Gorkha. Innocent people like me are in this situation. I have land but I can't return to my village and farm," says KC.

Before the state of emergency and even after it, dozens of women in Nuwakot have been widowed and hundreds of children have become orphans. Arjun Thakuri, a farmer of Sunakhani-9, has been missing since 10 December when he was out guiding security forces. Sita Thapa, a widow from Samundratara-4 Nuwakot, says the entire village was shocked when the radio announced that Sabin Kumar Thapa, a Maoist guerilla commander, was killed in an encounter. Says Sita Thapa, "On 16 June security forces took away my husband at four in the morning. They made him carry 50kg of stones and took him to the nearby Shera jungle and killed him. They searched my house and in the process my 7-year-old son Nirajan was hurt by a bullet. He can't write well today."

Parvati Pudasaini of Kumari-7 Nuwakot, another victim in the Dupcheshwore Protection Society Nuwakot, said her innocent husband was killed by security forces on 25 June. Before they killed him, they made him wear an army uniform and handed him a gun, she said. The victims have demanded all the cases are investigated and compensation delivered.



Nuwakot's widows and orphans.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Momila

BOTH INTERIOR AND OUTSPOKEN:

Momila's is one of the fresh young voices of the period following the reinstatement of democracy. Her poems are at the same time deeply interior and outspoken, expressing her political concerns through private, individuated expressions. The first poem below is one of the most succinct poems to be found on the social and psychological boundaries that girls are limited by.

PERHAPS!

Perhaps!

The young girl draws a border
by the pond beside the house
This is my home, Father!

The young girl draws a border
in the translated distance of passion
These are my tears, Father!

The young girl draws a border
in the rolling fog and the ocean wave
This is my joy, Father!

The young girl draws a border
in the transformed gales of conflict
This is my life, Father!

The young girl draws a border
in offerings of pity and in dream nymphs
This is my ineffectualness, Father!

The second poem, below, was written at the death of the climber Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, the first woman to climb Sagarmatha, who died on her descent.

AT THE LOSS OF A RHODODENDRON

(To Pasang Lhamu Sherpa)



At the loss of a rhododendron I thought of—
an evening of cherry blossoms in flower
a night of the redolent parijat flower
the pain of purple jacarandas on the street
the cry of the sarangi in the mute flowering hills
the blue earth from each angle of space...

I thought of you when your waking days
as beautiful as dreams turned to snow and fire
when your dream as difficult as the waking state
became victory-separation and touched the heart
I thought of the rhododendron blooming
at the blue borders of the flag's moon and sun
Even as a fool I found the soft touch of the fogs grand
I remembered the tears dropping
at the sorrowful tune of the snow and wind
at the loss of a rhododendron...

In the Himalayan canvas of the country
you are a beautiful collage
A blue mountain waterfall in the settlements of grief
And...so
Excellent poems are breaking out of eyes
Beautiful tunes are playing in the songs
In your name
I sat down to write an excellent poem
I tried to compose a beautiful song
but no poem could excel over you
no song could be more beautiful than you

At the loss of a rhododendron...

Momila's voice is clear, clean and sophisticated, and she deserves more attention than she has perhaps received.

FICTION

by PRADIPTA SJB RANA

The Naked Truth

Second in the British Council Short Story (15-18 category)

By her sixteenth year she was still not used to the taunts, abuse and beatings. One month she missed her periods. She was horrified. She had overheard women talking about what that meant. She tried to hide the sign of new life as it grew in her. The milkman found out first, followed by the baniya and then the local mahajan. The news spread and her troubles increased.

People called her a whore and spat on her face. Soon the village Panchayat summoned her, demanding to know the truth.

Someone threw a stone at her from the crowd. She shouted in protest but her cries were drowned out by the angry voices of the mob. The Sarpanch asked everyone to be quiet. In the silence only her sobs could be heard. No one made an attempt to calm her, not even the postmaster. He stood there like a stone. The pleading in her eyes only reflected the helplessness in his.

"So tell me girl, whose child are you carrying?" the Sarpanch questioned.

Though her heart protested she brokenly said, "The panditji."

The mob became hysterical. Was she certain, she was asked. With tears streaming down her face she replied, "Sarpanch, your community is without compassion and your beliefs are so rigid. I am an untouchable who has been abused by the most respected amongst you, the keeper of your religion, the pandit."

Uproar broke amongst the people but the Sarpanch called for her to continue.

"Why does everyone torment me? Can't a priest have dirty thoughts? Why is your hypocritical society so shocked?" she cried out.

The pandit was sent for. He



Vacancy for Thermal Energy Expert



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- Seeing the unseen: The Kathmandu Valley as Chakrasamvara Mandal by Dina Bangdel at Indigo Gallery
- Poetry of Abstractions by Uttam Nepali at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 9 February. Baber Mahal Revisted. 218048
- From now until Valentines Paintings and sculptures by the LEAF group at Lazimpat Gallery Café.
- Kosi Tappu Migratory Birds Festival 2-8 February, Wetlands Day. Aqua Birds Unlimited 441226

EVENTS

- Men in Black, Women in Red dance and open bar at Nepa Dhuku Hall at Hotel Radisson on 31 January. Tickets: Single-Rs 1,299, Couple-Rs 1,999. Available at Roots, Labels, Station Pub, Suwal and Nanglo outlets. 246545
- Jangi Nishan 1974 AD's new album launch on 6 February 2PM at Moksh, Pulchowk. Live performance. Entry by invitation only.
- The Legends Night Songs by Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, Kurt Cobain and and Janis Joplin on 1 February, 6PM onwards at Megha Malhar, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. Rs 1,111 pp. Tickets available at Station Pub-250970, Himalayan Java-422519.
- Sur Sudha lecture/demonstration from the Cultural Studies Group of Nepal. Membership tea at 10AM on 1 February, Hotel Shanker, Lazimpat. Entry free, CSGN membership available.
- Verge Inn Leisure Club Food, fashion, music by Robin n' Looza: on 2 February 5-7PM. Rs 500 pp. Funds for children's scholarships. 271768

MUSIC

- The Steam Injuns with Abhaya presents Acoustic Sessions at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat every Friday from 7.30-11PM. The Strings every Saturday from 7-11PM. 416071
- Live music by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336
- Rusty Nails presents their blues, jazz and beyond, 7.30 PM every Friday at The Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, Battispulali. 479488
- Friday Nites at Jatra with The Strings. Free entry. Thamel
- Gaines Traditional Nepali music every night at Kantipur Restaurant, Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 680083/ 80
- Sketches with Abhaya and The Steam Injuns at Moksh, Sanepa on 1 February, 6.30 PM onwards. Entry: Rs 300. 528703
- Thunder Bolt led by Ram Shrestha, Live at Ga Zabko 6PM till late on 31 January. Free Entry. Gazabko Cocktail Café, 415432

DRINKS

- Kiwi Sensations Cocktails, mocktails and desserts made with organic kiwis 11AM till midnight daily at The Piano Lounge and Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- Paddy Foley's Irish Pub A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096
- Rang Mahal Buy one drink and get one free from the house of Seagrams and Carlsberg Beer. Dinner and performances by Kathmandu's top dancers. 7-10PM, Hotel Vaishali. 413968/ 423878
- Fab Feb Friday Happy hour, free snacks, Seagrams whisky tasting. Live Music 4-7PM. Thomas Kilroy at 1905, Kantipath. 225272.

FOOD

- Kumari Restaurant and Bar Mixed menu, imported drinks at affordable prices. Putalisadak. 417958, 422666
- Krishnarpan 40 percent discount until February for 4 to 16 course Nepali meals. Dwarika's Hotel. Reservations 479488
- Patan Museum Café Mixed menu, traditional Nepali thali lunch, garden seating. 11AM-4PM. 25 percent off for Summit Club Members. 526271
- Italian cuisine The Coffee Shop's live pasta station for particular palates. Rs 350+tax with a free beer. Till 31 January at Hotel de l'Annapurna.
- Raclette and Fondue Table top cooking at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- Rox Restaurant Italian cuisine on Sundays. Antipasti, main course, pizzas and a dessert buffet. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza at Stupa View Restaurant and Terrace, Boudha. 480262
- Saturday BBQ Lunch at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 pp. 680083/ 80
- Sekuwa Saanjh Friday BBQ for Rs 555 plus tax pp, one free beer or soft drink. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- Hot Pot Combo Fab Feb Rs 100 Lunch 11AM-5PM This week at 1905, Kantipath. 225272

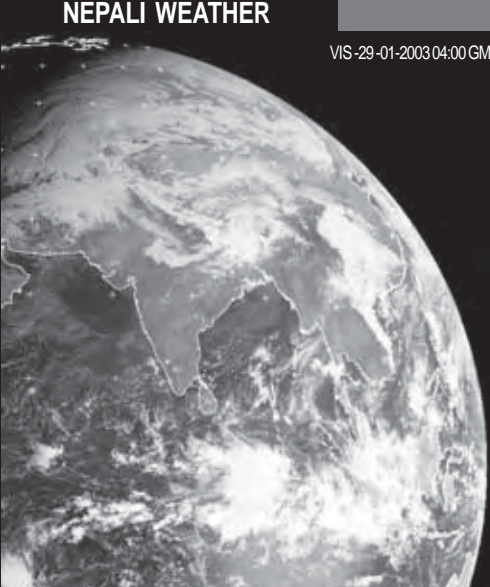
GETAWAYS

- Tea House Combo Room, breakfast, Nepali thali dinner, swimming, jacuzzi. Rs 700 pp on twin sharing for Nepalis and expats, Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 410432
- The Great Godavari Getaway Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner. Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge Rs 2750 pp per night (tax included) for accommodation, meals, arrival and departure transfers from Bijaypur, walks, bar snacks and swimming. 01-361500

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

NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-29-01-2003 04:00 GMT

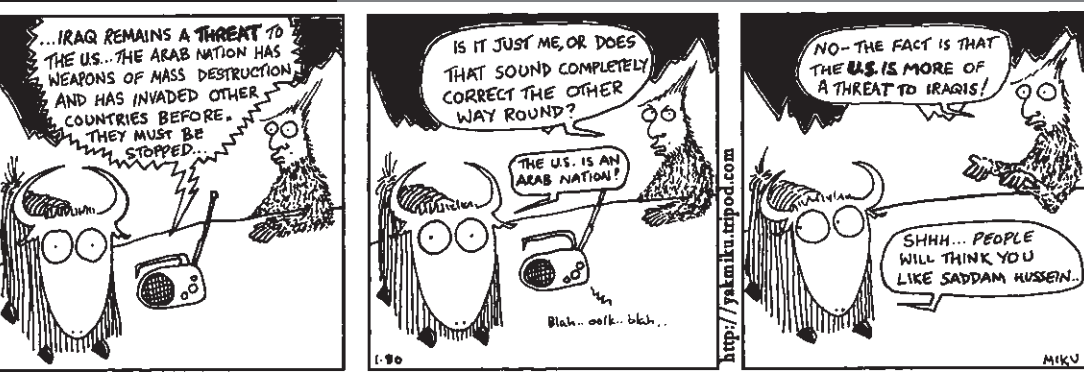


Just as we anticipated, the westerly front arrived on schedule dumping snow at high altitudes and rain across Nepal's midhills and tarai. As this satellite picture taken on Wednesday shows, the low pressure area covers Nepal and a large swath of northern India. Another front is following close behind and prevailing winds will bring it over Nepal during the weekend with another spell of rain. A low pressure region over the plateau is sucking these moisture-laden front towards us. Expect bright sunny days with a rise in maximum temperatures by early next week.


KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
17-02	18-01	19-01	20-01	21-00

YAK YETI YAK



by MIKU




BOOKWORM

London rose Durga Lal Shrestha
Pasa Puchah Guthi (UK)
Rs 200

This anthology of poems by the Kathmandu-born Newar poet speaks eloquently of his experiences as a Nepali living and observing life in the UK. Shrestha's Newari poems sit adjacent to English translations by Giridhar Manandhar.

Institutional management and human resource development Bhusan Pathak and Arjun Bhattarai
Social Youth Council, 2002
Rs 150

The contents of this slim book covers a wide area that social workers and development professionals need to be proficient in. It will be a useful tool for organisation management and training to professional skills like report writing, proposals and participatory rural appraisal.



Vegetation and society: Their interaction in the Himalayas
R P Chaudhary, B P Subedi, O R Vetas and T H Aase (ed)
Tribhuvan University, Nepal and University of Bergen, Norway, 2002
Rs 1,000

The volume contains papers dealing with environmental, social and economic aspects in the Himalayas with a focus on Arun valley in the Makalu-Barun region and the adjoining areas. The editors have used a multi-disciplinary approach that highlights the complex mosaic of the area's eco-system.

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


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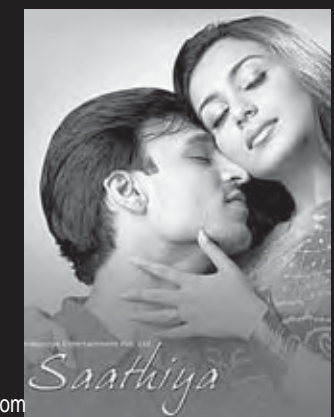
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Saathiya takes a new look at marital life showcasing its ups and downs. The small day to day fights, ego clashes, and most of all, the expectations for everything to be as beautiful and dreamy as it was before marriage. As a director, Shaad Ali could not have asked for a better opportunity or cast for his debut, a remake of the Mani Ratnam's Tamil Alaipayuthey. Saathiya stars Vivek Oberoi and Rani Mukherjee and features Sandhya Mridul, Tanuja, Satish Shah, Sharat Saxena. Shahrukh Khan and Tabu in supporting roles. A R Rahman's music and score is fantastic as is Anil Mehta's cinematography.

Saathiya

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Daily	2045-2115	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा
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Sun-Fri	0800- 0830	डबली (विषयगत अन्तरक्रिया)
Sun-Fri	2000- 2030	आजका कुरा (समसामयिक विषयमा बहस)
Sat	0800- 0830	शान्ति अभियान
Sat	1930- 2000	आचार विचार (षष्ठ्याचारविरुद्ध सहकार्य)
Sat	2000- 2030	कूटनीतिक सञ्च

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REVIEW

Kathmandu's untold stories





A new film that peers under the surface of the Valley's sexual culture.

Anjan Amatya Kishore Pandey Namrata Pradhan

RAMYATA LIMBU

Two years ago Sunil Pant almost gave up finding like-minded people to start a support system for homosexuals in Kathmandu. Today, the Blue Diamond Society provides psychosocial counseling, a drop-in centre and sexual health services for local networks of males having sex with males (MSMs) and male sex workers in Nepal.

Seated in the pleasant common room of the Blue Diamond Society in Lazimpat, Pant and his colleagues voice their frustrations and fears at a society that considers homosexuals freaks. They talk about abuse by the police, rape, torture, blackmail, family apathy and denial, and the individual fear of coming out of the closet.

"When I tried to register Blue Diamond Society with the Social Welfare Council as an NGO working for the health of homosexuals, I was advised it could lead to legal and social complications," recalls Pant who finally opted for the less-loaded term "male sexual health".

Sunil's centre along with groups like Richmond Foundation, Freedom Centre and Life giving and Life saving Society (LALS) all contributed to the UNICEF film, *Kathmandu: Untold Stories* which was released last month. Filmmakers Subina Shrestha and Alex Gabbay's 26-minute documentary explores the dark underbelly of Kathmandu society.

"The film is not really an AIDS awareness film in the proper sense," says Shrestha. "It's more about young people in the city who live lives their families know nothing of or don't want to know about. As they tell their stories, it becomes clear how complicated everything is. And how young people are forced into dangerous situations that often expose them to HIV/AIDS."

Shrestha and Gabbay interviewed friends, friends-of-friends and, with the help of various organisations working in HIV/AIDS, met people like 27-year-old Kishore Pandey, a government employee.

Pandey is a member of Blue Diamond Society, is happily married, loves his wife and has two children. But he has a "third life". He asks: "What do I lack? Why shouldn't I have married? Nobody in my family can tell that I am gay and I could not tell them. I didn't even know myself. I came to know about it much later."

But unlike the majority of MSMs who visit the society's counseling centre and drop-in clinic, Kishore is aware of the dangers of unsafe sex and the vulnerability of MSMs to HIV/AIDS. "Gays do test for HIV. We enjoy having sex and we have to be extra careful that we don't

Coming out...safely

On 1 February, approximately 70 participants from urban areas around Nepal will gather in Kathmandu for the first national consultation meeting for male reproductive and sexual health. "The rationale for the meeting is to explore the profound implications that male-to-male sexual behaviour may have for the STI/HIV-AIDS epidemic in Nepal," says organiser Sunil B Pant of the Blue Diamond Society. The society is a community-based sexual health service for local networks of males having sex with males (MSMs) and Male Sex Workers (MSWs) in Nepal. It has a drop-in centre, outreach clinic and clinical services focusing on STIs. The meeting will highlight issues like appropriate strategies and models to address not only the sexual health of MSMs and their partners in a culturally appropriate manner. Human rights concerns regarding MSMs, questions of stigmatisation and discrimination and the socio-cultural-religious contexts of male sexual behaviour in marriage and family will also be discussed.

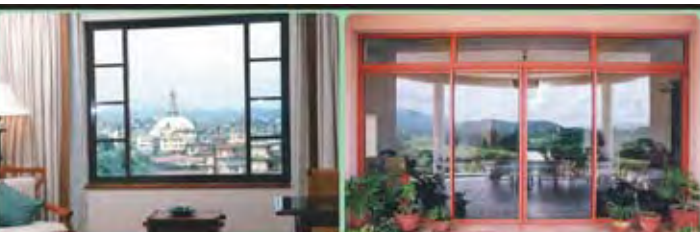
Blue Diamond Society Hotline: 443350

harm others."

People on camera insist that society must listen, talk and get out of denial. "The most ironic and hypocritical thing about our society is that families will get their sons or brothers married, knowing that they are HIV positive. They still want to save face, and he wants to have fun. He can neither say yes nor no. He'll give into parental pressures and get married," says Rajesh Chhettri, a 23-year-old student who became a drug addict after his parents died. "I was all alone. I could not deal with myself. I guess I took drugs because I felt isolated from my family," says Chhettri in the film.

AIDS is going to be the single biggest killer of Nepalis in the 15-49 age bracket in the coming decade. Commercial sex and injecting drug use are combining to spread the epidemic to the general population, which means that anyone, not just the vulnerable groups, are at risk. "But as long as the problem doesn't stare them directly in the face, it's difficult to take seriously," says Shrestha. The film was shot in Kathmandu so policy-makers in the capital would take notice. "If officials saw a film about the HIV problem in Achham or Doti, they would probably not identify with it," she adds.

At 19, Namrata Pradhan is comfortable with herself and her sexuality. She speaks frankly about love, sex and relationships and how it's wise to know someone well before progressing into a sexual relationship. She says, "But the problem starts



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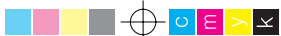
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Under My Hat

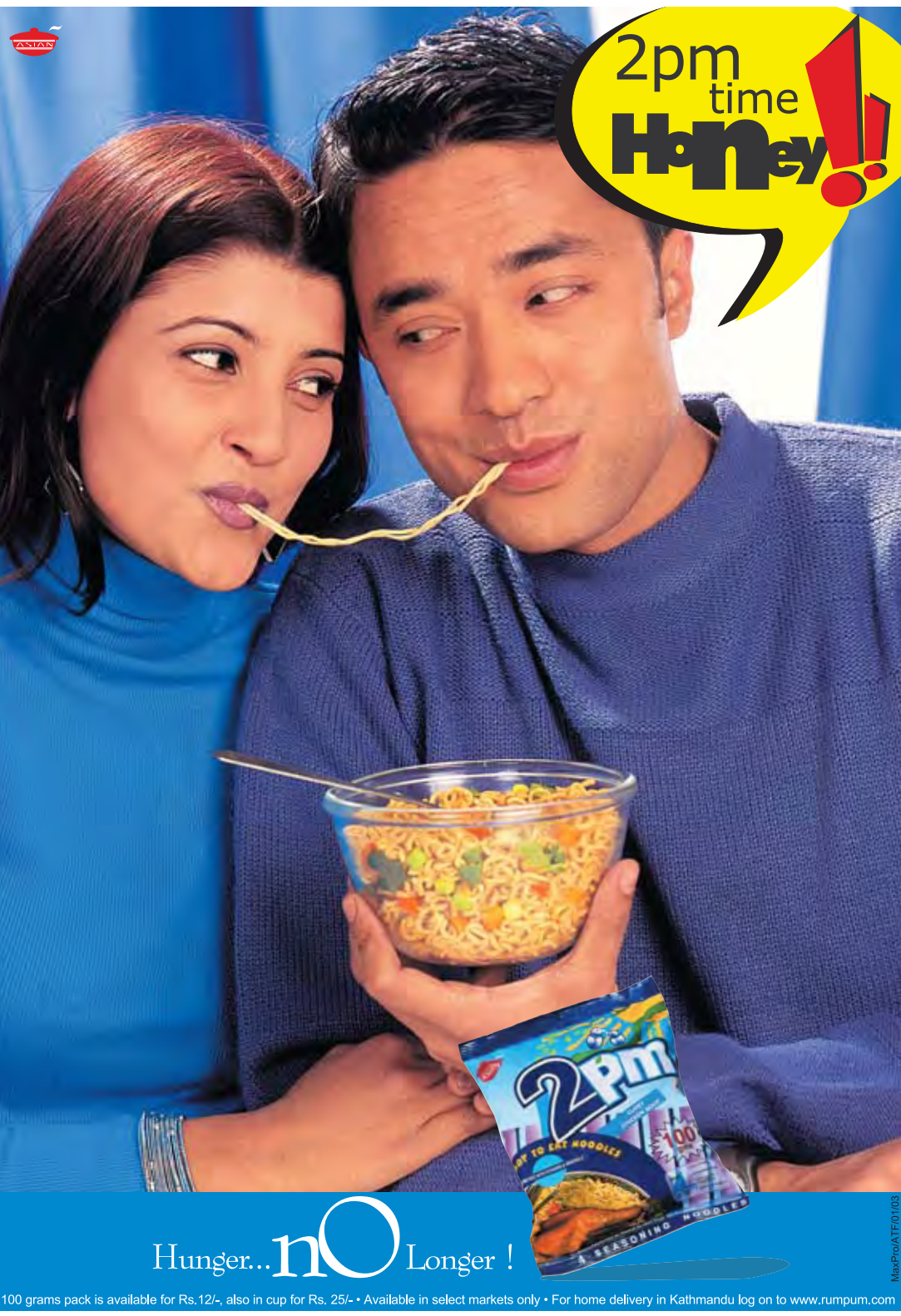
by Kunda Dixit

Visit Nepal (Or Else) Year, 2003

Among the many things we do to make visitors to Nepal more than welcome in Shangri-la is the ritual organised by the Department of Immigration requiring all inbound passengers arriving on the shores of our Landlocked Himalayan Kingdom to mandatorily hand in autographed Disembarkment Cards. Failure to do so results in an on-the-spot fine in cash or kind of an amount not exceeding \$100 (in unmarked \$10 bills plus 10 percent VAT and 2 percent Tourist Tax), or defestration from aircraft at an altitude of 35,000 ft over waypoint Romeo, or both.

The existing Disembarkation Card is a fine document, and we would be hard put to improve on the typographical oddities, quaint syntax and exotic grammar contained therein. However, there is always room for refinement and we have taken the liberty of presenting below a modified sample form with suggested answers for your future reference during 2003, which as you may have already figured out from the title of this piece, has been declared "Visit Nepal (Or Else) Year". In this way, NTB can glean more relevant information from visitors about just why it is that they want to visit Nepal when the rest of the world is keeping away:

DISEMBARKATION CARD					
Please write legibly in BLOCK letters. Strictly No Whispering, No Cheating and No Passing Chits. You may begin answering the questions starting now. For multiple answer questions, tick box.					
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Date of Birth	Date of Expiry	Present Nationality	Future Nationality		
Occupation: <input type="checkbox"/> Parachute journalist <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-terrorist <input type="checkbox"/> Ambulance chaser <input type="checkbox"/> Spy <input type="checkbox"/> Arms merchant <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-hippie <input type="checkbox"/> Smuggler <input type="checkbox"/> Development wallah <input type="checkbox"/> Peace consultant <input type="checkbox"/> All of the above					
Passport Colour	Place of Issue	Date of Issue	Best Before		
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Have you come before, if yes, how many times? <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple					
Please remember, while you are in Nepal: • Be mindful of the expiry date of your visa. You will not be allowed to leave if your visa has expired. If you have personally expired, you'll be allowed to leave. • Deviation from trekking permit is a violation of the law, perpetrators will be enlisted for the Mt Everest Cleanup Expedition • Do not encourage begging by being benevolent, be malevolent and give beggar a polymer Rs 50 note. • Respect local tradition, customs and values like pinching left nostril with right forefinger and expelling contents with a sharp outpouring; give the impression you are vomiting blood by spitting paan juice all over the hospital corridor. • Take care to reduce trashes and pollutions by dumping household rubbish on the sidewalk like everyone else.					
The Department of Immigration hopes you have a pleasant holiday in Nepal. Come Again.					
Date.....	Signature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Left thumbprint	<input type="checkbox"/>	Right thumbprint



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NEPALI SOCIETY

Michael, the mountaineer

Three decades after taking part in an expedition that climbed the southwest face of Sagarmatha (and 50 years after the world's highest peak was climbed for the first time) Michael Thompson still glows with a sense of achievement.

"Everest had been climbed many times up the South Col, but our expedition went straight up from the Western Cwm, at that time it was considered the last great problem in mountaineering," recalls Michael.

Apparently, Reinhold Messner thought so too. When the two finally met at a mountaineering meet two years ago, Messner acknowledged that he was also preparing to climb the southwest face, and when the British upstaged him he wanted to do something even more daring, and went on to become the first person to climb Sagarmatha solo and without bottled oxygen.

Michael is a soldier-turned-mountaineer-turned-anthropologist, and was in Kathmandu recently to speak on his favourite subject—culture theory, a research tool used to interpret human behaviour in hierarchies and groups and applied to analyse the failures of everything from mountaineering

expeditions to governments.

Michael's interest in Nepal and the Himalaya grew after he served with Gurkha soldiers during the counter-insurgency Malaya campaign in the late 1950's. He was in the 1970 Chris Bonnington expedition to the south face of Annapurna, one of the tallest vertical mountain walls on earth. Coming off the mountain, and on an easy stretch, Michael and his friend Ian Clough were caught in

an ice avalanche. Clough was killed and Michael survived miraculously. On the Everest southwest face expedition, another friend, Mick Burke, died on the way down from the summit.

"On average there was one death on every Bonnington expedition. And with 6 or 7 people on an expedition, the odds were not looking good," Michael told us. So he quit hard climbing and began studying the anthropology of expeditions, their organisation and financial aspects, looking at things like "risk perception". Of the numerous Sherpa climbers he interviewed, many got hooked and continued climbing. "A few Sherpas quit and went back to farming," Michael says. "They're not very rich, but they're quite content."

A bit like Michael himself, who now teaches at Norway's Bergen University where he is involved in research into technology and democracy. "This is a critical subject for countries like Nepal," he adds, "you have to make technological decisions, for example about high dams or fossil fuels, with huge potential impact." ♦



MIN BALACHARYA



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