



BHAGIRATH YOGI

The ceasefire has held for ten days now. But an even more difficult job lies ahead: agreeing on guidelines for dialogue, negotiating a common agenda, keeping factions left out of the peace process together, and not losing sight of the goal.

There are worrying signs that political parties excluded from the process are getting agitated. The cabinet hasn't been able to decide on the composition of its negotiating team even though the Maoists have named a squad leader in ideologue Baburam Bhattarai.

However, sources tell us secret contacts between the government's dialogue coordinator, Narayan Singh Pun and the Maoist team is taking place at an undisclosed location on the southern edge of the Valley. Pun's effort is to make as much progress as possible and not get distracted by the political wranglings. In a rare interview he told us, "It is a very long and complicated process. We must have patience to see this through."

Government spokesman and Minister of Information, Ramesh Nath Pandey, denies disagreement within the cabinet about Pun's mediation role and also that state-owned media is downplaying him. "This is not true," Pandey said. "The government has extended full support to Minister Pun."

So far, the scalebacks have come from the Maoists' side—calling off a two-day bandh and the cancellation of an indefinite nationwide education strike starting this month. For its part, the army has slightly relaxed its controls on movement of people

Let the talks begin

Negotiations need trust, tenacity and togetherness.



and food in the western region, but checkpoints on highways are as strict as ever and curfews in various urban hotspots have not yet been lifted.

"The Maoists look more sensitive and serious towards making progress compared to the government," says Iswor Chandra Gyawali, editor of the banned *Dishabodh*, a pro-Maoist paper who was released from

jail by the Chand administration after a year behind bars.

For his part, Pun says he is trying to avoid repeating past mistakes. One thing going for him is that both sides are more serious about finding a negotiated solution to the conflict than they were in 2001.

Those talks failed when the rebels walked out of negotiations accusing the government

of being too rigid.

Rights activists say it will be important for the two sides to first agree on a code of conduct including a complete cessation of all offensives, violence and extortion by both sides. The others would be to initiate confidence-building measures, not wait for talks to start before launching relief and rehabilitation efforts in the hinterland.

"They should have guidelines and, if need be, get international agencies to monitor compliance on the ground," says Sudip Pathak, of the rights group, HURON.

But all these details will pale in comparison when the hard bargaining on substantive issues actually start. The two sides need to agree on an immediate setting up of an all-party interim government (perhaps including Maoist ministers) and elections to a constituent assembly to change the constitution. In his address, Chand made a pointed reference to Nepal's "monarchical culture", hinting that this was non-negotiable.

While the government and the parties bicker away, the Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been busy this week calling up leaders of political parties from his hideout. So far he has spoken to Madhav Kumar Nepal, Narayan Man Bijukchhe and Girija Koirala. Dahal reportedly told them his group did not favour direct negotiations with the king and would like to see the party leaders at a roundtable conference.

"We have had one week of peace, but there is no clear idea who is holding these talks, under whose authority," constitutional lawyer, Bipin Adhikari, told us. "How can an illegitimate government hold talks with the Maoists on behalf of the Nepali people?" There seems to be no alternative to the monarchy, the Maoists and the parties getting together, and that seems to be a greater hurdle than even getting Baburam and Pun together.

With the Maoists willing to come out into the political mainstream, non-Maoist forces, too, will have to unite to protect their interests. This is possible only if the king and parties agree to sort out their differences and sit on the same side of the table. ♦

Editorial p2
For talks, don't talk.

Bhutan ready to take some refugees back

KUNDA DIXIT

Nepal and Bhutan are inching towards partially repatriating some of the 100,000 Bhutanese refugees who have been living in camps in eastern Nepal for the past 12 years.

Officials from the two countries have been doing the diplomatic shuttle. Foreign Minister Narendra Bikram Shah flew to Bhutan three weeks ago. Then his counterpart Lyonpo Jigme Y Thinley paid a return visit to Kathmandu this week for the 12th Joint Ministerial Meeting (see picture). Both ministers sounded upbeat at a press conference on Thursday evening, announcing the next series of ministerial talks in Thimpu on 24 March. The Joint Verification Teams will also meet in Thimpu on 24 February. "We are under pressure from the Nepali public, from the media and donors to resolve this issue quickly and fairly," Shah told reporters.

But they sidestepped questions about a proposal by Bhutan, which sources told us will involve the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Bhutan. Under the proposal, which seems to be a trial balloon, the refugees would be asked to choose whether they want to return to Bhutan or stay in Nepal. Asked about this proposal, Thinley said, "No comment."

Under growing international pressure, Bhutan now seems reconciled to taking some of the refugees back. It may be hoping that if given the choice, many will not opt to return to an uncertain future in Bhutan where their homesteads may have been resettled by other Bhutanese. Bhutan's donors are reportedly considering rehabilitation support for the refugees who agree to return to Bhutan.

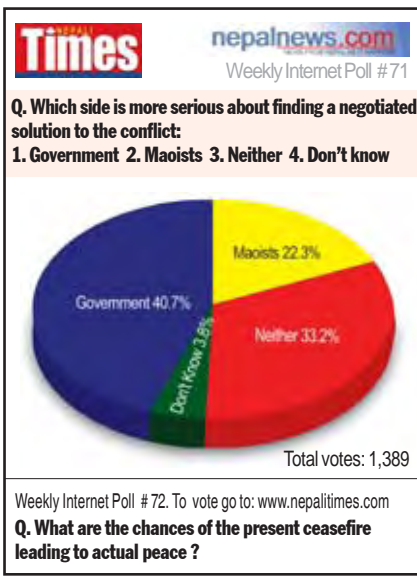
Asked what the refugees thought of the proposal, Bhutanese rights activist, Ratan Gazmere told us, "It is totally unacceptable. As citizens of Bhutan, we have the right to return to our



country. They can't just take some of us back and leave the others behind." Refugee leaders say the Bhutanese government is trying to divide the exiled community.

Some 12,000 refugees living in Khudunabari went through the verification process in 2001, and more than 90 percent were said to have documents to prove they were Bhutanese. But the joint team has not made public the result of the exercise. This week, refugees from six other camps in Jhapa have joined 4,000 Bhutanese at the Khudunabari Camp who have been on a relay hunger strike for over a month. They demand the immediate publication of verification results, repatriation of verified refugees and starting verification in the other camps.

Most analysts agree that India has a critical role to play in mediating the refugee issue, since Bhutan and Nepal do not have a contiguous border and the refugees all passed through India to enter Nepal. New Delhi also controls Bhutan's foreign policy, but it maintains that the refugee issue is a bilateral problem that Nepal and Bhutan have to resolve. ♦



Weekly Internet Poll # 72. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What are the chances of the present ceasefire leading to actual peace ?



Marcopolo





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FOR TALKS, DON'T TALK.

For this peace process to start, there should be a moratorium on self-serving politicians, ex-politicians, would-be politicians and activists opening their mouths. We're all for freedom of expression, but nothing these stalwarts of democracy are saying is pragmatic or constructive. It reeks of the same cynicism, negativism and intrigue that brought the country to this sorry state. Will we ever learn?

If this is the way it's always going to be, then we despair for this country. It's hard not to be deterministic about it, because more than any other human sub-species, Nepali politicians seem to be genetically hardwired for disunity. Disagreement in democracy's marketplace of ideas is a healthy thing, and agreeing to disagree is the way we move forward. But here, our disagreements paralyse us, because they become so personal and are fed by base instincts like jealousy, greed and a dog-eat-dog competition for power and wealth.

Even after a truce is announced, this is what we see before us: political parties not able to agree among themselves about how to agree with the king about an agreement with the Maoists. There are interlocking layers of disagreements—within parties, between parties, between the parties and the king, between the parties and the Maoists, between the king and the Maoists, and among the Maoists themselves.

What's more, there are even members of the cabinet who can't seem to be able to countenance the idea of a colleague from a minority community being in the limelight for putting the country back on track to peace. Politicians everywhere are known for their short-term tunnel vision, but only our politicians will destroy each other over who is going to get the glory for restoring peace. Even a fissiparous protozoa has better instinct about the common good.

The Nepali peoples' tragedy is that we never got the leaders we deserved. From a limited line-up of mediocre talent, we chose the ones that had the likeliest potential to exhibit vision, statesmanship and altruism. We hoped they would rise above selfish or partisan interest, but no such luck. It's about time these failed characters stopped trying to wreck things just because someone else is trying to fix a problem they contributed to creating.

So, instead of moaning, hemming and hawing, how about helping out in the process of peace-building? There is much that can start immediately to restore the peoples' confidence with a Marshall Plan-type nationwide reconstruction and reconciliation campaign. Money will not be a problem, donors are still standing by for a government that works.

But peace won't just fall on our laps, it has to be painstakingly rebuilt. The Maoists are worried about their militia and cadre. Who is going to feed them in the run-up to talks? Some dacoits who became Maoবাদis in the Rautahat area have gone back to their dacoit ways. This could happen elsewhere if a system is not in place urgently for their assimilation.

All this is not going to be easy, and it needs everyone pulling together in the same direction. A ceasefire with the Maoists was perhaps the easy part. Maybe what we actually first need is a ceasefire between the palace and the parties.



SIBAN'S PAIR



SIBAN'S PAIR

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Comrade Prime Minister?

After Janakapur, Madhav Nepal is raring to go places.

Advance information from the prime minister's office had indicated that Lokendra Bahadur Chand's address to the nation on Monday evening would be an "important" one. It was to be broadcast live by Radio Nepal and Nepal Television.

The sense of anticipation was so strong that Radio Sagarmatha and Kantipur FM had a battery of commentators ready to pounce on the text and analyse it to bits on the spot. In the end, the preparation turned out to be pointless. Minister-in-Chief Chand delivered an anti-climax by failing to announce his expected resignation.

Earlier in the morning, Chand and his wife had performed special puja at Pashupatinath, raising hopes that he had finally realised the futility of his stay in Baluwatar. Later in the day, he faced cameras with the huge lump of holy sandalwood paste stuck to his forehead.

By his refusal to bow out gracefully, Chand has shown that he is willing to risk being kicked out as ignominiously as his predecessor. By all indications, ouster of this courtiers' cabinet is only a matter of time. For the mainstreaming process of the Maoists to continue smoothly, he and most of his colleagues will have to go. The question is no longer if, it's just how soon.

As a matter of fact, the present administration fulfilled its main function the day it was formed. The appointment of Chand as prime minister was a clear message to the Maoists and their international backers that there was no ambiguity any more in the unity of command of all the forces at the disposal of the state. For a while, all political parties could wander in the wilderness, the king had decided that a drastic disease warranted a drastic remedy.

Since 4 October, the resolution of the insurgency has been the number one priority of the real power centre, while the dummies in Singh Darbar were free to entertain the masses with their antics. In retrospect, the buffoonery of some ministers appears to have been intentional; decoys for the real behind-the-scene negotiations. Since talk about talks has come out in the open now, perhaps there is no need to maintain a virtual cabinet any longer and go for a real one that divides up the spoils among the main political contenders in the corridors of power.

The Maoists' claim that the leadership of government always goes to the successor political regime isn't without merit. After the success of the People's Movement, it was the Nepali Congress and the Left Front that took over the reigns of government, and if that precedence is to hold, Chand should prepare to hand over the charge to Baburam Bhattarai.

However, unlike in 1990 the Maoists aren't clear winners of a political movement, they are merely a party to an armed conflict. Although Maoists are more powerful than the political parties ever were, Bhattarai had to wait for a government decision in order to be able to sit for negotiations. The Maoists' power is illegitimate, hence it lacks the authority that the leaders of the People's Movement in 1990 had. Even at best, the status of the Maoist cadre is no better than that of Jhaphi Communists in mid-seventies who had burst upon the Nepali political

firmament with no less force at that time. Bhattarai's name may be quite acceptable to the social elite of the Kathmandu Valley as the next prime minister, but the rest of the country would not be as ready to accept him. Donors would need coaxing before they agree to do business with a person who had a price on his head till very recently.

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's pronouncement notwithstanding, the chance of the restoration of dissolved parliament is getting more and more remote. Even if the house were to be restored, it's quite unlikely that it will once again accept Bhattarai's blue-eyed boy, Sher Bahadur Deuba, as its leader. In all probability, the new leader of the old house will now be Comrade Madhav Nepal, victor in the UML's just concluded Janakapur Convention. Perhaps it is in him that the search for the new prime minister could end. Speaker Taranath Rana Bhat is another contender, but he may remain just that.

A new premier must have the following qualities:

- political adroitness to take the process of mainstreaming of the Maoists to its logical conclusion,
- ability to see through local and parliamentary elections as soon as possible and
- must enjoy the confidence of Comrade Prachanda and Girija Prasad Koirala as well as that of certain important foreign powers.

Observers who have been following the political dexterity of Comrade Nepal in the wake of 4 October are convinced that he fits the bill on all the three counts. Had he not withdrawn from the Royal Commission to investigate the Narayanhihi Massacre, his chance would have come much earlier. But he seems to have made up for that glaring lack of courage by being instrumental in pulling down the Koirala government last year.

The commissar of Balkhu has waited in the wings for far too long. After Janakapur, Comrade Nepal is raring to go places. The next place for him could be an all-important negotiating table set for the Maoists. Comrade Prachanda should be happy to see a hammer and sickle fly over Nepal again—even if that logo has the sun symbol in the background. Blessed are the patient. ♦

by PRAMOD MISHRA



Baburam, how are you going to translate your doctrine of armed struggle into democratic revolution after all this?

honour when so much innocent blood has been spilt? Why didn't they listen when activists within and outside Nepal agreed with their assessment of the 1990 change, but said that revolution, though absolutely essential for Nepal, could—should not—be violent? A peaceful, yet durable revolution through a system of radical democracy was indeed possible. Liquidating selected class enemies may be easy, but transforming an entire society for long-term equality and justice requires moral courage, intellectual rigour and hard work of a different kind. Baburam, how are you going to translate your doctrine of armed struggle into democratic revolution after all this? ♦

(Pramod Mishra teaches literature and writing at Augustana College in Illinois, USA)

NATION

OPINION

Why did King Gyanendra and the Maoist leadership decide to talk now? It could be what is called the "principal-agent problem". The "principals" are the king and the Maoist leaders, and their armies are the respective "agents". Given the six years of strategic dynamics between the Maoists and the security forces leading right up to the killing of IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha on 26 January, losing control of the agents' behavior in an escalating conflict would have been a genuine fear.

In six years, the Maoists' sphere of influence increased from just nine districts to 66. Lately, the state too had moved beyond tie-for-tie tactics to hunting down rebel militia inflicting a 5:1 "kill ratio". The fact that many of these were not even Maoists had started coming out in scathing human rights reports. Then came the killing of the APF chief. This was a new and dangerous escalation that had the potential of reprisal killings by death squads just like El Salvador in the 1980s.

In such a scenario, both principals (the king and the Maoists) could have lost control of their over-stretched and influential agents. In addition, the agents may have begun to carve out a set of their own incentives. The Maoists cadre already had a taste of extortion, bank robberies and executions—all in the name of their political mission. And with the political parties sidelined, unleashing a well-equipped army on an increasingly brutal counter-insurgency campaign would have been difficult to monitor for Kathmandu.

The kidnapping of school children and the alleged rape incidents in Nepalganj by the security forces could have been some of the signs of a principal-agent problem. If the conflict is prolonged and positions

harden, it would be more likely that the military and the monarchy would both be bargaining chips in future negotiations. Worse yet, a full-scale civil war was not so far-fetched anymore. By trying to find an early resolution, negotiations can be limited to some of the Maoists' lesser demands.

So, this truce and negotiated settlement are in the best interests of everyone—the monarchy, the military and the Maoists. But for it to work, the political parties must be brought into the picture. They alone have the mechanism to serve as a go-between between the monarchy and the people. In addition, the Maoists must be wooed into the political mainstream.

The road ahead is fraught with obstacles. Most importantly, the negotiating parties must widen the scope of the purposed constituent assembly. After public debate, consultation and feedback, an elected constituent assembly can easily be converted into a parliament after the task of

creating a new constitution is over. Some nations like South Africa have done precisely this to save resources.

A set of constitutional mechanisms should be introduced to make the parliament more accountable, stable, responsible and sovereign. It will require major changes in many areas;

- a decentralised system of regional or even zonal governments to devolve power and responsibility to the grassroots,
- a more inclusive electoral method like the proportional representation system,
- instituting a system of constructive vote of no confidence to ensure stability in the parliament,
- instituting a set of code of conduct in politics to minimise conflict of interest and reduce institutional corruption, and importantly
- removal of ambiguity in the constitution to ensure the separation of powers.

On the issue of separation of powers, the parliament must be made sovereign by clearly defining the power and responsibility of the king. This will require key changes in the Constitution in the following areas;

- Article 118: Provisions Regarding the Royal Nepal Army,
- Article 115: Emergency Powers,
- Article 127: Power to Remove Obstacles,
- Article 35: Executive Powers,
- Article 31: Questions Not To Be Raised in Court, and
- Article 128: Provisions Regarding the Council of Ministers.

Much of the acrimonious debate regarding the 4 October royal move can be summarised as follows: A sitting prime minister loses its party support on the issue of extending the emergency, he collides head-on with his party president and gets expelled from the party. He then recommends the dissolution of parliament, dissolves local elected bodies and contemplates postponing the election date. The king uses Article 127 to fire an elected prime minister for his incompetence in contradiction to the Article 35.2, which requires that any such moves be brought in front of the Council of Ministers and the prime minister himself. The new interim government gets formed against the spirit of the Article 128, which clearly requires participation by the main political parties. Ironically, Article 31 does not allow any debate regarding the constitutionality of the moves.

Most contentious of all is Article 118 about provisions regarding the Royal Nepal Army. The parliament does not seem to have a clear-cut authority to declare an emergency (Article 115), and

a heavy reliance on a small set of individuals—a three-person Defense Council—to make decision on the security related matters seems undemocratic. Further, the inclusion of the commander-in-chief as a member of the Council is a conflict of interest. In almost all democracies, the primary role of the army is to follow orders. It should not be involved in any political decision-making process, nor should it ever be put in a position that compels it to question the motives of the elected government. There is much ambiguity regarding the role and authority of the democratically elected government's ability to mobilise the army. The new constitution must clarify these ambiguities.

What we have to safeguard are the accomplishments of the 1990 Peoples' Movement and the new constitution that restored sovereignty in the people. We have to make sure that the sacrifices many made 12 years ago and also in 1951 for the ideals of democracy will not be in vain. And of course, there is the sacrifice of nearly 8,000 Nepali lives in the past seven years, and the destitution, displacement and bereavement of hundreds of thousands of our citizens. We owe it to them to make this work. Finding a lasting solution to the conflict will then put us on a road to finally improving the living conditions of the Nepali people. The road ahead is fraught with obstacles. But we cannot give up trying. We owe it to our future generations and to our brave ancestors who created, preserved and defended this nation. ♦

(Alok K Bohara, PhD, is professor of economics at the University of New Mexico, USA. bohara@unm.edu)

LETTERS

CEASEFIRE

● Kunda Dixit hits the nail on the head ("Can't fail this time", #130) when he says it was an endgame-scenario for both the Maoists and the king. Unlike the national government, which can bank on foreign money and arms, the rebels have access to limited resources. For his part, the king desperately needed something to give legitimacy to his rule having come to power dismissing an elected government. But let's not gloat too much over a half-baked cake. Ask former Prime Minister Deuba how the peace fanfare suddenly turned into a political nightmare in October, 2001. It's still a very fluid situation.

The formation of the interim government and then the election to the constituent assembly are going to be extremely messy if the Maoists, the monarchy and the political parties don't learn to keep an open mind in the talks ahead. How about bringing in an objective third party to the peace equation, the Norwegians, for instance, at some point? Above all, I am most concerned that very little has been done to bring political parties aboard the emerging political equation. There can be no lasting peace without their participation. Hats off to Narayan Singh Pun. Only time will tell whether there were other key players behind an unlikely truce. But at this point, let's give Pun his due. And King Gyanendra, too. Peace is well within our grasp, but can we do

away with our huge baggage of prejudices, petty interests, and oversized egos?

Akhilesh Upadhyay, New York

● It is quite obvious after reading "Can't fail this time" that both the king and the Maoists now need a soft landing. King Gyanendra wants to be seen as the one who brought peace back, while the Maoists suddenly realise that they are on a dead-end revolution. And what of the political parties? After having failed the people and shown naked their selfishness are they just going to sulk in the corner or are they going to help, instead of making nasty statements questioning the king's motives and conjuring "grand designs"? The only grand design here has been the utter failure of these elected leaders to be responsive to the peoples' needs.

N Sibakoti, Min Bhawan

● I am doubtful about true peace returning to Nepal any time soon. We have irreversibly changed our society with all these indiscriminate killings, the brutality, the lack of compassion and humanity. Our traditional

Nepali generosity, self-esteem and pride have suffered a major blow. It will take decades to return to normalcy, and it will only happen with a peace process that doesn't just address conflict but also its deep underlying roots.

Lila Pandey, Sanepa

● You suggest the absence of war is not peace in your balanced and well-argued editorial ("The absence of war is not peace", #130). Good point. But the peace process needs another vital ingredient—the absence of malice. We have seen in the case of the Sri Lankan ceasefire that malice has cropped up more than the peacemakers had hoped. Could this be rectified in the Nepali peace process?

Jack Prasai, South Africa

compartment of a car is the survival zone for vehicle occupants, and a seat belt is just one of the interior restraint components. Chances of survival are high if the occupants are trapped in vehicles and not ejected. However, it is actually the pedestrians and non-motorised cyclists who are the most vulnerable groups in Nepal. What seat belts offer to those groups is almost negligible. Accident trends in Nepal reflects the lack of road safety measures, poor knowledge of the driver, ineffective legislation and improper licensing systems. What one expects in such situation is pedestrian protection, facilitated cycling, conditioned vehicles and licensing systems that examine basic knowledge on vehicle dynamics and traffic laws. Fulfilling minimal safety requirements neither require tremendous efforts nor huge capital but strong desire, sharp vision, careful homework, strict policy and proper legislation. Implementing seat belt laws in Nepal could be a first step for the future, but is far away from the real issues of road safety.

Deepak Kaphe, Linköpings University, Sweden

DISSEMBARKATION

I feel that the section Under My Hat in your paper is rather childish and senseless. I wonder who enjoys such crude jokes. Yes, it tries to address burning issues in our society, but the way it is presented spoils the whole story. Take "Visit Nepal (Or Else) Year 2003" (#130). Does that disembarkation card look funny? It would be interesting if the writer used humour in more subtle ways. Quality papers like yours should not include mindless stuff like this. I hope my comments, despite being rather blunt, is taken in the constructive spirit in which it was offered.

Rabin Tuladhar Project Researcher Asian Institute of Technology Bangkok

● Kunda Dixit's Disembarkation Card had me rolling on the floor. But if you thought that was funny, you should read the real one they distribute on flights. It is even funnier than Under My Hat. On a recent flight in, it had me rolling in the aisle.

Sara L, email



KIRAN PANDEY



SHIVA GAULE

They used to whisper about it till a decade ago. Now, it is an open secret. The street-walkers at dusk along Rani Pokhari, the red light districts, the “cabin” restaurants. Lonely migrant men, women trying to earn enough to feed their children all caught up in Kathmandu Valley’s burgeoning urbanisation that is fuelling a burgeoning sex trade.

And as usual, the puritans are pressing for punishing prostitutes. Forgetting that without male clients there would be no sex workers. They call for a ban, knowing fully well how it fosters corruption, exploitation and growth of street mafia. And then there are the activists who are organising sex workers and lobbying for legalisation.

There are an estimated 30,000 women sex workers in Kathmandu Valley. The nature, growth and magnitude of the problem shows that a restrictive environment or punishment will not prevent prostitution, nor will it help women sex workers.

Our month-long investigation showed a large proportion of the

women work in organised commercial sex work through various outlets like dance and cabin restaurants, massage parlours and a handful of discos. The police can do little. The law does not allow them to officially arrest them on charges of selling sex. They are charge-sheeted with “disturbing peace and security” under the public offence laws. Deputy Superintendent of Police Binod Singh of the Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation Branch told us, “We should designate red-light areas otherwise there should be a law to try these women.”

A recent raid proved to be an eye-opener even for jaded officers like Singh. Groups of young women plied their trade from organised, well-furnished brothels in uptown addresses in Kuleswor, Balkhu and Anamnagar. The women carried mobile phones, rode scooters or hired taxis, frequented expensive restaurants and lived comfortably. An alleged commercial sex worker who was released due to lack of sufficient evidence claims that the commercial sex workers who entertain only upper-class clients can afford cars and houses of their

own. Prasi, a 21-year-old from Jhapa now living on her own in Kathmandu, admitted to the police that she shared a flat in Baneshwor with other sex workers. The 40-year-old in their midst said she just “managed” while 25-year-old Karki candidly said it was easy money. It challenged old notions that only poor women are prostitutes.

There is no official data on sex workers and studies conducted by activist groups don’t tally. The Kathmandu office of the International Labour Organisation says there are 2,650 sex workers in the Valley. Two other NGOs came up with 5,000, while a British researcher estimated that up to 25,000 women are involved in sex work. There is proof that the number of women is far greater than previously assumed. Nepal Police and Health Ministry sources now say there are some 30,000 sex workers in the Valley, and they are not only from the middle and low-income groups. They cut across ethnic and caste groups, geographical regions, and even prostitutes from India and Tibet have been found. But the police have made no in roads into

expensive upper class prostitutes who work through five star hotels and casinos, and are rumoured to be politically influential.

Kathmandu’s sex workers are trying to get organised and fight for their rights. Last year, they met then health minister Sharat Singh Bhandari to demand legalisation of commercial sex work and creation of red light areas for protection against health risks, physical and economic exploitation. Bhandari gave them a sympathetic hearing and got sucked into controversy himself for advocating legalisation.

Nepali law is silent about sex work and rights over individual’s sexual preferences. There are contradictions between state policy and society’s mores that will not easily allow commercial sex to be recognised as an occupation. Nepal courts have already set a precedent that two consenting adults can have sexual encounters or give birth to a baby outside wedlock. It also established that commercial sex should be recognised as an occupation. A bench headed by Chief Justice Kedar Nath Upadhyaya said selling sex was an occupation, whether it is legally recognised or

not. The May 2001 verdict also stated that the article 12 (2) of the Constitution granted citizens the right of freedom to carry out an occupation, employment, industry or trade unless a law stops it on the grounds that that such activity threatens public health or morality.

However, conservative parliamentarians last year demanded that commercial sex should be penalised with a strict law, a move that could have been a populist morality card to wave at voters. In March 2002, the Lower House overwhelmingly voted for a law that penalised those involved in voluntary sex work as well as those who coerce somebody into commercial sex. Both face prison for three to five years and a fine up to Rs 100,000. This law was annulled with the dismissal of parliament in May 2002.

The present legal confusion—neither recognising nor penalising sex work—has compelled police to take action against prostitutes they come across on the streets. DSP Binod Singh believes the solution lies in programs to reform society. “A moralistic state is not the answer,” he says.

If punishment were the answer, the number of sex workers would have gone down with arrests.

What is worrying is that nearly 20 percent of sex workers surveyed last year in Kathmandu tested positive for HIV/AIDS. There is a deadly nexus between unprotected commercial sex and injecting drug use in Nepal. Many prostitutes are also drug addicts and vice versa, and the clients of sex workers are transmitting the virus into the general population. More than half a sample group of injecting drug users in Kathmandu recently tested positive for HIV.

“Stricter laws against commercial sex trade can have a backlash,” warns former health minister Sharat Singh Bhandari, who is credited with having done more for legalising sex work and combating AIDS than most other officials. “The state should realise that there is a vast difference between those who take up the trade voluntarily and those who are coerced into selling sex,” Bhandari told us. “The problem won’t disappear if we ignore it.” ♦

Sex for sale



The only job available

Neither the law nor the fear of police action deterred Shrestha, a 25-year-old who has been arrested four times. She was 19 when her marriage to a shopkeeper ended. Alone and with a baby, she was unable to return to her maternal home. Shrestha started living in a rented room at Sat Dobato. With little education and no skills, jobs were hard to come by and she couldn’t scrape enough together to survive on. An old school friend arranged for her to work as a waitress at a dance restaurant for Rs 3,000 a month, barely sufficient for her and the baby. Expenses mounted as the child grew older. He needed to go to school and waitressing wouldn’t pay the bills. With no one to turn to, she started to seek clients.

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Hear this

The visiting chief of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy, urged all Nepali parties involved in violent conflict not to recruit child soldiers. Bellamy did not name the Maoists but said the rights of children should get top priority in the peace negotiations and that schools should be declared “Zones of Peace.” She said the ceasefire was a ray of hope for the country’s 11 million children.

Addressing the delegates of “Accelerating the Momentum in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS in South Asia”, a high level regional conference in Kathmandu between 3-4 February, Bellamy stressed the importance of investing in education to counter the growing menace of AIDS. She said girls were particularly vulnerable to the threat of AIDS and recommended better publicity campaigns and proactive activities to reduce gender inequalities, stigma, discrimination, poverty and abuse of human rights—the major determinants of the AIDS epidemic.

The senior UN official also called for regional action instead of just localised national programs. She said a large number of young people were at high risk. Over 40 million HIV-infected people live in South Asia out of a total of 400 million HIV-infected world population. A UN report says nearly half of them are below 29 years of age.

Gold Quest banned

The Home Ministry banned Hong Kong-based company Gold Quest this week, calling it illegal. Over 10,000 Nepalis all over the country have joined this scheme that offers a gold coin for Rs 37,500 (approximately \$480) and a bonus of \$4,000 after recruiting 100 more members to the scheme. “You could earn up to \$2,400 a day,” claimed a Gold Quest counsellor.

But officials say the pyramid scheme, which is not registered with the government, dupes unsuspecting people and results in a huge outflow of money from the country. Gold Quest was first introduced to the country two years ago by an NRN visiting Pokhara. “It’s a hundred percent fraud,” said Krishna Bahadur Manandhar, chief of the foreign exchange department at the Nepal Rastra Bank. He admitted that the central bank was not in a position to regulate the scheme as there are no written records or agreements of transactions.



Back to the Gulf

The government has withdrawn a ban on Nepali women working in the Gulf countries. The Ministry of Labour and Transport Management said on Tuesday that the decision had been reversed because rights activists labelled it ‘discriminatory’. The announcement says, “The women concerned, however, will be allowed to visit abroad for work only after the concerned agency and the Royal Nepalese embassy/consulate in the concerned country guarantee safe working environments there.” The government imposed the ban after Kani Sherpa committed suicide in Qatar five years ago after prolonged sexual exploitation by her employers. (Nepali Times, #127)

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

USAID/Nepal invites applications from all qualified Nepalese citizens for the following position under a Personal Services Contract, subject to availability of funds.

1. A.I.D. Development Program Specialist, FSNPSC-10 (Entry Level at FSNPSC-9, depending upon qualifications and work experience)

Basic Functions of Position: The A.I.D. Development Program Specialist is an FSN mid-level professional on the USAID/Nepal Health and Family Planning Team (Strategic Objective 2: “Decreased fertility and protected health of Nepalese families”). Reporting directly to the SO2 Family Planning/Maternal and Child Health Technical Team Leader, the incumbent serves in a mid-level capacity providing technical, programmatic and administrative support and in overseeing activities under the SO2 reproductive health portfolio. Other areas of responsibility include active participation, as requested, as a USAID/Nepal representative in central-level Government of Nepal Ministry of Health policy development meetings, donor and implementing partner coordination meetings and program-related workshops and seminars.

2. DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS:

A. EDUCATION: Advanced degree in social or behavioral sciences, health, public health, or other relevant fields. A master’s degree in public health is required, doctoral degree in public health or similar field desired. An equivalent of 3 to 5 years of experience in the field of public health is acceptable as an alternative to graduate degree.

B. EXPERIENCE: Three to five years of prior mid-level experience in the field of public health is required; prior work experience with USAID or another international agency desired. Experience managing programs, including fiscal management required.

C. LANGUAGE: Level IV (fluent) in English is required.

D. KNOWLEDGE: Working knowledge of technical and programmatic reproductive health issues in Nepal and the approaches to address them. Knowledge of evaluation methods, both quantitative and qualitative, required.

E. ABILITIES/SKILLS: Must possess the ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with USAID, USAID implementing partners, central and district level Government of Nepal and non-governmental organization counterparts. Must possess high quality analytical skills and the ability to assess ongoing public health interventions to evaluate their efficacy and efficiency. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing is essential. Word-processing and computer skills are required. Excellent interpersonal skills and an ability to work in a team environment.

Interested individuals may contact the Human Resources Office, USAID/Nepal, Rabi Bhawan for a detailed job description for the above position and Biographical Data Sheet. Applications must be in the form of a letter of interest, a detailed curriculum vitae or resume and the USAID Biographical Data Sheet along with Nepali citizenship paper and academic certifications. Applications must be received in the Human Resources Office no later than 5:00 p.m. on March 3, 2003. Applications received after the submission date will not be considered. **Women candidates are encouraged to apply. Please give your telephone number where you can be contacted. TELEPHONE INQUIRIES ARE DISCOURAGED. ONLY SHORT-LISTED CANDIDATES WILL BE CALLED FOR AN INTERVIEW.**

Human Resources Specialist
USAID/Nepal
Rabi Bhawan
Kathmandu

Listen to the Jumlis

by DANIEL LAK



It’s hard not to feel elated about the chances for peace, or at least a long drawn out session of jaw-jaw, not war-war. And for once, I’m not going to look for worms in the pudding. If they’re lurking, they’ll poke their heads up soon enough. Instead, a few thoughts from the hinterland where so few of our Kathmandu folk dare to tread.

There can be no exaggerating the sense of urgency. No chardonnay-sipping party-goer in the capital can imagine how bad it is out there. And where is “there”? It’s everywhere, people, everywhere. I’ve just come from Jumla, scene of the last and worst major Maoist attack. Just in case anyone in Kathmandu has forgotten, and it certainly seems to the Jumli’s that they have, this was a town devastated by violence. It remains that way, despite distant talk of ceasefires, bargaining committees and the sanctity of certain bargaining positions.

Perhaps a good start for both negotiating teams in the upcoming peace talks would be a tour of the hardest hit areas of Nepal, and we could start with Jumla. Arrive by air and the destruction greets you. The airport control tower and the living quarters of the staff lie in blackened ruins. So do 40 other buildings in this valley forsaken by the gods on at least one night last November.

Many of the blown-up and gutted houses belonged to ordinary local people. Their crime was having a sign on the front of their home. To the Maoists who stormed Jumla, such signboards, whether for local NGO’s, a Canadian aid project or a privately owned printing press, were a magnet. Apparently they assumed that such signs meant government offices. But it was largely ordinary people and those trying to help them who were hit. And you know what? No one’s done a damn thing for those ordinary victims since that night. Not the government, not the aid world, not we journalists, not anyone.



So the negotiators gets the quick tour of Jumla and if the return flight is delayed due to fog, perhaps they could all spend the night. The cold and the curfew, the fear of night and the desperate hope at sunrise, the bleak feeling that no one is paying attention, all these might add some urgency to proceedings. But let’s assume that Yeti Airways manages to find seats for the bargainers, or Shangri La, or even RNAC. I’d suggest a talk with the pilots of any of those airlines as the Twin Otter crosses the passes between high points in the middle hills. You’ll hear some tales from them—of the wrecked and dangerous airfields where they’ve flown in food, the mass public gatherings that could not have been staged or held through coercion, and the looks in the eyes of passengers coming in and out of remote destinations. Our negotiators might even talk to their fellow passengers.

With a week-old ceasefire, some thoughts from the hinterland where so few Kathmandu folk dare to tread.

Probably we’d touch next at Nepalganj, town of smugglers, mosques and brass work markets—now the heart of civil war. Why not wander over to Bheri Zonal Hospital where Dr Durga Pradhan keeps watch on a trauma ward for civilians caught in crossfire or damaged by savagery on both sides. Check with beleaguered human rights activists who thought they were only trying to help, but ended up as enemies of the state, or targets of the revolution. Ask the teachers from private schools west of the Karnali queuing up to get passports at the CDO’s office why they’re leaving the country, despite news of the ceasefire.

There are so many other places that I’d like the peace negotiators to visit. The villages of Bajura where hunger is a growing threat, not starvation, just long, malnutrition-fueled economic decline. Humla, where innovative development and political enlightenment have been sabotaged by war and rebel intransigence. Rukum and Rolpa to hear what the heartland of the revolution thinks. And just about every other part of this country that’s been either ignored or misinterpreted by national figures from all sides in this war.

The ceasefire provides immense opportunity for innovative thinking and inclusive behaviour. And a good place to start is with the men (where are the women?) who have the fate of the nation in their hands. Think of it as “Destination Nepal 2003”. ♦

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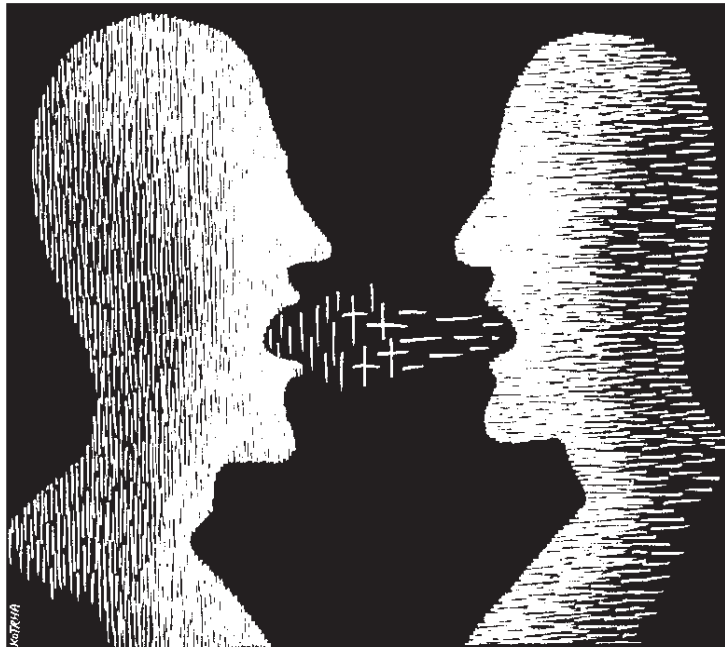
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The Maoists have conferred legitimacy upon Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand's government. But that's not what really riles Kangresis, comrades and others in the beleaguered political centre. Since they are the ones complaining the loudest about

how the palace has appropriated full executive powers, they know where the credit would have to go if the peace process succeeded.

Worse, one of the two hitherto obscure facilitators pointedly asserted there is a greater chance of success this time precisely because the main

Peace pitfalls

From here on, behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings can only foment misfortune.

parties aren't around to play their games. (I wonder what Messrs Jhapali and Lamichhane thought of a cabinet where key colleagues of Narayan Singh Pun were ruling out a breakthrough until the very end. Constructive deception or contemptuous deceit?)

Not that some mainstream politicians weren't up to something of their own. Forget about the CPN-UML. They were too obsessed with the threat of implosion ahead of the party convention. The Kangresi trinity was back in action. The abrupt moderation in Nepali Congress

president Gijira Prasad Koirala's anti-palace rhetoric after the armed police chief's murder couldn't have been only a reflection of the nation's funereal mood. Was Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's decision to break his long vow of silence by demanding the restoration of the House of Representatives inspired purely by electoral altruism? Was Sher Bahadur Deuba really so hurt by the Maoists' conduct last time that he couldn't contemplate sitting down for talks with them again?

It's easy to see the lack-of-transparency credo cutting across

mainstream party lines as a symptom of injured pride. The moans of marginalisation, however, have a deeper message. Since negotiations often involve a course the interlocutors wouldn't have embarked on had they known what lay ahead, some allowance for uncertainty is warranted. When there are far too many questions than answers, you have to get serious. Speculation over a possible connection between the extreme right and the extreme left has already cast a shadow on the peace process. Might the palace want to use its current

assertiveness to seek a formal political role tomorrow? Such questions are logical, but should not be allowed to cloud our immediate priorities.

We've passed the phase where secret negotiations were a compulsion of sorts. From here on, behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings can only foment misfortune. The negotiators must not be allowed to speak in different languages to the media and on the table. (How many of us aren't still dying to know what the leaders of six parties in the dissolved Lower House really told the king during the first week of October 2002?) Public knowledge of the substantive issues could prepare the people for the ensuing compromises. Those intent on preserving the gains of the 1990 People's Movement and those committed to building on them are invoking the sovereign people. Instead of languishing in lament, the mainstream parties should recognise their strength. They can make the people feel a sense of partnership every step of the way.

Their activism would help achieve another critical objective—demilitarising the peace process. Both sides have come this far after recognising that their armed might could lead them no further. It's now time for political minds to speak up. Since it would fall on the political centre to run any new order, mainstream parties must take their seats around the table. Despite their evident reservations, most would probably do that. They must feel comfortable. A persistent sense of marginalisation would preclude them from going along with the agenda and unravel the entire process. That same feeling, on the other hand, could make any outcome they endorsed meaningless.

Mainstream parties must work to ensure that drafts and revisions are as explicit as possible. That way, everybody could recognise their common interests in compromise and the perils of maintaining the status quo. Creative ambiguity may make it easier for the interlocutors to come closer. The rest of the country would be better off if everybody understood they were reading from the same text.

One lesson from 1990 is particularly instructive. At that late-night meeting at Narayanhiti on 8 April, Bhattarai equated the lifting of the ban on political parties with the restoration of multiparty democracy. United Left Front president Sahana Pradhan did not share that sentiment and told him so. Silence. As a result, we still can't figure out Chand's place in history—the last panchayat prime minister or the first one under the restored multiparty system? Or both, since his government straddled the two eras? That may look like a historical footnote. Just don't say it hasn't haunted our collective conscience. ♦



by PUSKAR BHUSAL

THE FULBRIGHT & THE EAST-WEST CENTER 2003 SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION

The Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal (USEF/ Nepal) announces the 2003 competition for the Fulbright and the East-West Center (EWC) Scholarships. Those selected would begin their studies in the US beginning August-September, 2004. (a) The Fulbright program provides all expenses (including travel) for a Master's degree program of up to two years at selected U.S. universities, in any field except medicine, engineering or computer science. (b) The EWC scholarships of the University of Hawaii (UH) are available for Master's or doctoral-level study in any field offered at UH and cover all tuition and fees, but not travel expenses. Applicants for either program may be employees in any government or semi-government agency, private business, NGO or INGO.

General Requirements for Entering the Competition

- All applicants must:
1. possess Nepali citizenship;
 2. demonstrate in post-intermediate degrees a minimum aggregate marks of: 56% for students in non-technical fields (humanities and social sciences), and 60% for students in science and technical fields. (The minimum requirements for students under the semester system are: 65% in non-technical fields; 70% in technical fields; or a Cumulative GPA of 3.5/4.0 in either field.)
 3. have a high level of competence in speaking, reading and writing English. (Applicants who pass the first screening will be required to sit for an English test during the application process. The test requirement will be waived for those who have a valid TOEFL score of 213 or higher and have submitted copies of their score reports with their applications.)
 4. be under 40 years of age as of the application filing deadline date (March 31, 2003);
 5. possess either a four-year bachelor's degree; or, if the bachelor's degree was of fewer than four years duration, then a master's degree is also required, such that the total number of years of formal education equals at least 16;
 6. have at least three years (for men) or one year (for women) of post-bachelor's degree, full-time, professional work experience in an area directly relevant to the applicant's chosen field of study as of the application filing deadline date (March 31, 2003) and document this experience by letter(s) from employer(s) that verify applicant's position(s) and years of employment;
 7. be in excellent health, as evidenced by a letter from a medical doctor; and
 8. be eligible for a U.S. visa.
- Note: Individuals holding master's degrees equivalent to a U.S. master's degree are ineligible to apply for the Fulbright scholarship competition, but are eligible to apply for the East-West Center competition Ph.D. program; and individuals who have previously resided in the United States for six months or more during the preceding five years are ineligible to apply for both the competitions.

(Applicants must submit documentary evidence for items No. 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7.)

Application Forms & Deadlines

Application forms and detailed information regarding the competition are available from: the USEF/Nepal office at the American Center in Gyaneshwor (between 11 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday); the Ministry of Education; the National Planning Commission; Tribhuvan University Rector's Office; Kathmandu University Rector's Office; and with Campus Chiefs at out of the Valley degree campuses. **Applications and information may also be accessed and downloaded from the Commission's website: www.fulbrightnepal.org.np.** Application forms must be taken out from the USEF office or downloaded from the website by 4:00 p.m. Friday, March 21, 2003. No applications will be given out after this date. Duplicate, hardcopy, completed applications must reach the Fulbright Commission (USEF) no later than 4:00 p.m. Monday, March 31, 2003. Incomplete applications or applications received after this deadline will not be considered.

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Announcement

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Primary Teacher Training Programme

Rato Bangala Foundation, together with Kathmandu University and Bank Street College of Education in New York, will be taking in candidates for its second year long course to begin in May 2003.

The following will be the schedule:

- Distribution of Admission Forms: February 10, 2003.
- Submission Deadline: March 20
- Essay Writing, Interviews: by March 30
- Result: April 10
- Registration: April 10 through 30th
- Classes Begin: May 15, 2003

Candidates must have a 10+2 degree for Certification and a Bachelors Degree for a Post Graduate Diploma in Education.

The strength of the programme lies in the close weave between theory and practice in the teaching and learning process.

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Insurance for children

Nepal Life Insurance, which has specialised in accident insurance, has launched a scheme to insure children from the day they are born to age 11, or for children from age 7-19. There are three options; collect a lump sum when the children reach age 19, or receive 20 percent of payment in instalments between ages 18-22. "Although there are other insurance schemes in the market targeted at children, NLIC provides parents and guardians the opportunity to ensure education and other benefits," says the company.



Fujitsu is here

ATC Group, Nepal's leading trading and industrial house, is all set to launch Fujitsu personal computers in Nepal with the introduction of two models; the LifeBook notebook with touch screen panel and DeskPower PC.

Best in show

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nepal (ICAN) selected the annual report of the Standard Chartered Bank Nepal Limited as the "Best Presented Annual Report for the financial year 2000/01" from ten others. Finance Minister Badri Prasad Shrestha presented the first award of it's kind to SCBL on 31 January.

Trade lines

Bilateral railway agreements and trans-border movement of motor vehicles will be on the agenda next week at the third round of talks between Nepali and Indian officials starting 8 February in Kathmandu. It will be led by Chhabi Raj Pant, director general at the Department of Transport Management (DTM) and Purushottam Ojha, joint secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies respectively.

A possible bone of contention could be Nepal's "One Time Lock System" ensuring direct entry of containers in the Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Sirsiya, Birgunj after inspections at the Kolkata port in India. The Nepali government is under pressure to operationalise the Birgunj dry port, completed two years ago, by September this year when the extended deadline of the ICD project matures.

Another cola

US-based Royal Crown Cola International recently introduced RC Cola products to the Nepali market. The 175-strong franchise ISO 90001:2000 awarded company is being marketed by S S Impex in Nepal in conjunction with Partex, Bangladesh. They come in 250 ml cans of Cola, Diet, Royal Crown and Royal Cloudy Lemon flavours.



Increasing capital

Laxmi Bank, a private sector commercial bank, has decided to increase its paid up capital to Rs 550 million at its second annual general meeting on 2 February. Chaired by Mohan Gopal Khatun, it also has plans to float public shares within the current fiscal year. The Laxmi Bank began full-fledged operations as the country's 16th commercial bank from April last year. It has branches in Jeetpur and Banepa.

Bank on EBL

The Everest Bank (EBL), a joint venture with the Punjab National Bank of India, opened its 14th branch at Lazimpat and moved its corporate office to the new building. Inaugurating the new branch on 3 February, governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank Tilak Rawal, lauded the bank's growth in the last few years. Addressing the function, S S Dabas, executive director of the Bank, said EBL's business proposition has always been to provide high value service to customers through competitive pricing, innovative products and quality services.



Miles Colebrook is group president of the advertising multinational, J Walter Thompson (JWT) based in London. He is in Kathmandu this week to assess market potential in Nepal, and is accompanied by Mike Khanna, JWT's area director looking after Central Asia, which includes Nepal. Colebrook has been with Thompson since 1966 and rose up the ranks to become CEO of JWT Europe where instead of Miles he was known as "Kilometres". Colebrook spoke to Nepali Times about JWT's plans for the region as well as the prospects here for Thompson Nepal.

"The key to the region is economic growth in the powerhouse that is India..."

What is the purpose of your visit to Nepal this week?

J Walter Thompson's business in what we call "Central Asia" is extremely important to us, it is one of the top seven areas of the world for us. Nepal is part of that region and this is the first occasion I've had a chance to visit our office in Kathmandu.

We've heard J Walter Thomson calls itself the university of advertising, and you put a lot of emphasis on training. How important is that for your Nepal operations?

We do indeed put a lot of emphasis on training. In our business we only have one asset and that is our people around the world. We believe we owe it both to our people and indeed to the company to train them to the best of our ability and we do spend a considerable proportion of our revenue on training. JWT in Nepal has the same access to training as anyone else in J Walter Thompson and we normally try to arrange it on a regional basis.

Advertising had flattened in the Asia-Pacific after the economic crisis. Is there now a rebound?

It is true that the last two years have been relatively tough for advertising. Indeed it has been relatively tough for most businesses. Having said that, we have found that Asia-Pacific has been particularly resilient to the economic crisis and we are certainly confident looking towards the future that there will be a recovery and that the Asia-Pacific will be in the frontline of that recovery.

What is the trend for growth of the industry in South Asia?

We certainly see a growth trend in future across the whole

In gold we trust



In times of economic uncertainty, the world has always turned to gold.

Over the past two months the surge of gold prices in Nepal has left people wondering where the real glitter lies. The Beed's advice has been sought after by many on whether it was a good time to buy gold or sell it off. It is difficult to make any snap judgement in the Nepali context because we, as a people, regularly defy logic.

Gold prices in the international market has stagnated over the past decade. The current price hovers at \$370 per ounce and the trend is rising. Gold prices that fell steadily since 1993 are suddenly seeing a spike in the higher ranges. Speculators always look back to historical prices for future plays in the gold market. The logic that drives the argument of stratospheric prices for gold lies in the past—the psychological barrier was set in 1980 when one ounce fetched \$595—causing the retro-wired to ask, if then, why not now? As a commodity, gold has always been a good buy but especially when the winds of war begin to blow.

The same logic pervades the Nepali scramble to stock gold. The international climate is accentuated in our domestic environment by an absence of other investment opportunities, low rates of interest and a lack of viable economic activity. Of the many analyses for the current gold rush, impending war seems to be the most plausible one.

The impact of war can take the dollar for a spin. The fact that the war may go on too long and too far can stall the already slowing US



economy. The plummeting value of US stock markets and the unearthing of new corporate scandals have made buying stocks a risky option. The strengthening of the euro and other currencies against the dollar does not help matters. The Beed predicts that, in the event of war, many oil rich Middle Easterners will convert their dollars to more neutral currencies, sucking liquidity out of the US market. The safest route for all the countries at this time may be to revert to gold to ride through the rough times ahead.

While the demand for the precious metal is certain to grow, the supply end of the business is lagging behind, primarily due to production costs surpassing the retail prices. A return to inflated 1980s prices will undoubtedly change all that.

The current prices are demand driven to the extent of speculation only. Since gold has little industrial value, high consumption remains in South Asia, especially India, and some other Asian countries. Indian consumption has a strong bearing on the Nepali market because

historically gold that entered Nepal found its way south of the border to India. Ten years ago that was the hallmark of our economy. Our per capita import of gold was inexplicable.

In a poll conducted by the World Gold Council in early January showed gold prices in 2003 as well as 2004 will have a mean price of \$342 per ounce with a probable high of \$400. For Nepal it means that the stabilisation point may be at the Rs 9,000 mark per tola. However, we need to bear in mind that this price assumes the stability of the dollar against the Nepali currency. Should the Indian rupee gain against the dollar the conversion rates will be revised and so will the price of gold.

But back to beginning when the Beed was asked whether to divest or invest in this precious metal; any good speculator will tell you it's all a gamble. Only time will tell if the future glitter is gold. ♦

(Readers can post their views or comments at arthabeed@yahoo.com)

Bird country

There are more bird species found in Nepal than in entire North America.



MIN. BARACHARYA

A flock of cattle egrets take flight over Boj Pokhari in Kathmandu.



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

It is when you can swing your 8*24 binoculars at a rustle in the bush, focus quickly and whisper, "White-rumped Shama" that you know you have arrived into the fascinating world of Himalayan bird watching. For a small country, Nepal racks up an impressive 850 species of birds—more than the entire North American

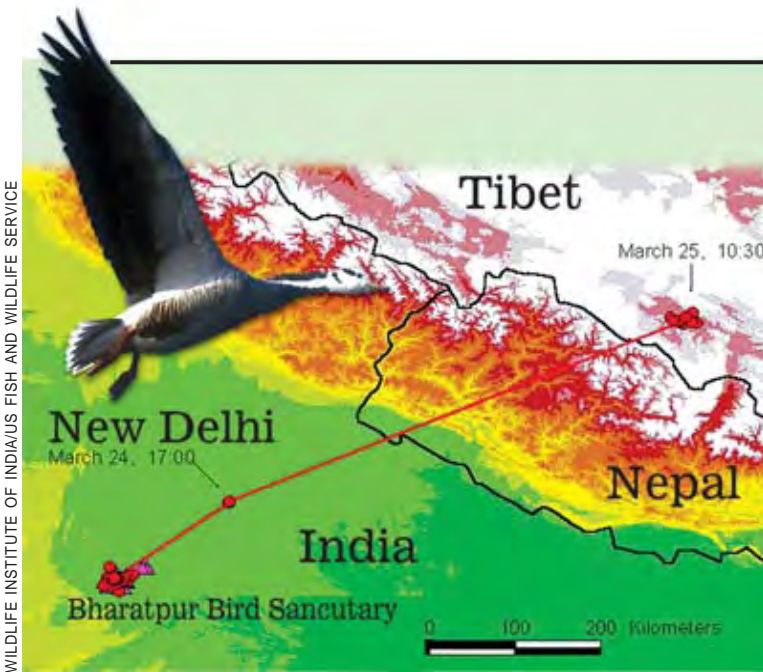
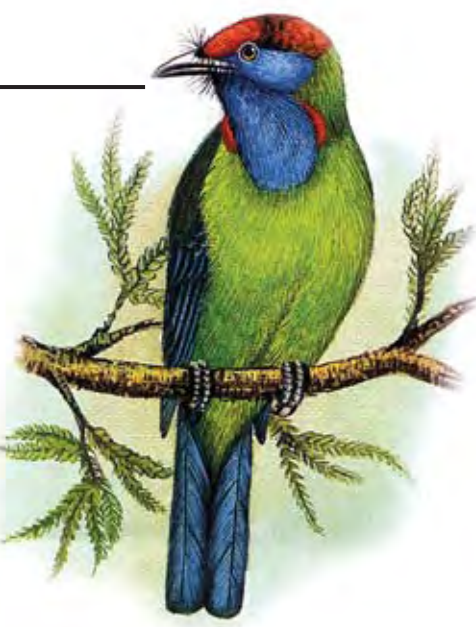
continent. New bird species are found every year. We owe our amazing diversity mostly to very fortuitous geography and great altitude variation. From the Kosi Tappu at barely 90m above sea level, the terrain rises to nearly 9,000m—all within 160km as the lammergeyer flies. The country lies smack dab on an east-west Himalayan divide of which the Kali Gandaki Valley forms a distinct avian boundary. It is bound between the "Paleo-arctic" realm to the north (Tibet, Siberia) and the "Indo-malayan" realm to the south (India, south-east Asia). Of the species found in Nepal, about 620 breed and live in Nepal. Another 124 breed in the neighbourhood but live here in significant

numbers. Then there are another hundred or so migratory species that transit through Nepal in their long-range migrations from Siberia to Africa, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Nepal is a major destination for bird watchers from Europe and Japan. They come in droves from December through March, before the monsoons set in, when the days are warm and nights not too chilly. The truly dedicated oviparous obsessed can be seen rustling in the bush on the slopes of Shivapuri, and others have flocked this week to Kosi Tappu the richest site for migratory birds. You can tell them apart from regular tourists by the powerful binoculars slung around their

necks, sturdy shoes and no late carousing so they can be up at the crack of dawn to watch the early bird catch its worm. Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve sits at the point where the mighty river disgorges itself out of the mountains before entering India. Kosi Tappu is located on the migratory route of birds travelling down from Tibet along the Arun River—all factors that contribute to the great variety of birdlife found here. At 88m above sea level, the Kosi Barrage and the big reservoir that it has built up is the favourite haunt for ducks and geese. Robert Fleming, Sr (one of the authors of the classic *Birds of Nepal*) counted 32,000 ducks of 19 species here before the

preserve was established. Today, with protection, there must be more. Less numerous, but equally magnificent, are the bossy looking black-necked adjutant storks, and the flippity finch larks. But habitat destruction is a worry. Bharat Basnet, the Managing Director of The Explore Nepal Group which runs the Kosi Tappu Wildlife Camp, has managed to spark interest in local schools for bird watching. Some sharp eyed, smart school students eventually join as local guides. "What is more important than a specific species is the habitat. If the habitat is preserved then all the inhabitants will be protected," Bharat told us. Don't despair if you can't

make it to the tarai. Kathmandu has some fabulous bird-watching areas in the foothills surrounding the Valley. If Nepal is a treasure house of birdlife, then Phulchoki south of Kathmandu is Nepal's bird and butterfly vault. Deforestation along the margins of this once-protected broadleaved forest and raucous picnickers have spoilt the atmosphere somewhat,



but Phulchoki is still alive with birds. The peak soars to 3,000m from the valley floor and has sunbirds, finches, minivets, barbets and the elusive and legendary spiny babbler—the only other bird species that is endemic to Nepal (the other being a sub species of the kalij pheasant). Many birdwatchers make regular pilgrimages to Phulchoki to look for the spiny babbler, but you have to

be very lucky to see it. A morning hike in Godavari leads us to a small clearing in the woods. Right in front are half a dozen kalij pheasants feeding on the ground. Our arrival disturbs them, and the kalij erupt into wings and flap off into the undergrowth. Within Phulchoki's vertical variation of 1,500m and 70 sq km area live 265 species of birds—one-fourth of all bird species found in Nepal. Some 86 of the bird species on Phulchoki are migratory. Godavari resident, Mahendra Singh Limbu, is a lepidopterist-turned-bird watcher. He tells us, "At least six of the species found in Phulchoki are rare and endangered." The blue-napped pita, rufus throated hill partridge, blue-winged laughing thrush, grey-sided laughing thrush, grey-chinned

High fliers

Tracking bar-headed geese by satellite during their twice-a-year trans-Himalayan migration shows the endurance, stamina, determination and navigation skills of these high-flying birds. Satellites tracked a wired goose while it flew from the Bharatpur Wildlife Reserve in north India, across western Nepal up to the Tibetan plateau, crossing three countries. The bird flew over 500km from near New Delhi, overflow Dhangadi, Jumla, across the "hump" to lakes north of Mustang in Tibet—a non-stop night flight lasting 16 hours and 30 minutes. Birds in Nepal have also set amazing altitude records. Acclimatised Himalayan choughs, for instance, have been seen by mountaineers soaring at nearly 8,000m above the South Col below

the summit of Sagarmatha. George Shaller in his book, *Stones of Silence*, reports seeing bar-headed geese at an incredible 9,000m above the Himalaya. Even if that was a fluke, and the flock was coasting on an updraft in the jet-stream, there are plenty of regular sightings by mountaineers of geese honking their way past Dhaulagiri at 7,300m. Some of these geese (*karyankurung*) are known to take off in spring from the banks of the Rapti River in the Royal Chitwan National Park, head due north and reach their cruising altitude by the time they arrive above Tatopani. Just sit by the Kali Gandaki in October or April and you see the traffic of geese and ducks quacking and honking as if this is an avian superhighway linking Siberia to Chitwan. The theory explaining stratospheric bird flight is that the birds have been migrating along this route when the mountains were much younger and lower. They flew higher and higher as the Himalayan mountains were pushed up, and evolved better lungs and flying ability over millions of years. And you just have to watch Tibet-bound terns and ducks refueling at Gokyo Lake in early April to be struck by awe and wonder at these incredible birds.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BHAMA LAL DANOLSHARMA DANOL

Mai Valley in the east have not yet been declared protected areas. There is a move to declare Phulchoki and Chandragiri ranges nature sanctuaries, but that may take time. In the past 15 years, forests in Nepal's midhills have returned, and with them many of the resident and migratory birds. What worries conservationists is that tarai forests are disappearing fast, and this is where most bird species are. When the hardwood forests go, marshes are drained, pesticides are used indiscriminately, then birds disappear. "Conservation of Nepal's forests is vital, for the future of people as well as for birds," write Carol and Tim Inskipp in their book, *A Guide to the Birds of Nepal*. "The aim should be to balance the needs

of local people, trekkers and the natural environment." Most of Nepal's endangered birds are dependent on forests, and 90 percent of these species are also found in Nepal's national parks and nature reserves. The answer lies in bolstering conservation in these areas, and what better way to do that than to use income from bird watching tourism to protect Nepal's rich bird diversity. ♦

MIN. BARACHARYA



Kathmandu Valley

- Discerning birdwatchers make a day trip to Phulchoki and Godavari Botanical Gardens to the south-east of the Valley, a subtropical broadleaved forest. Those lucky may catch a glimpse of the elusive spiny babbler. Avoid on public holidays—people and birds are inversely proportionate.
- Gokarna Safari Park is just east of Kathmandu and easily accessible. The park opens early and charges a small fee. Give yourself half a day to admire the owls, wintering thrushes and flycatchers who favour the mature trees in the park.

Where to birdwatch.

- Above Balaju is Nagarjuna, a 2015m mountain that has a protected forest, providing a rich habitat for birds. Expect to see kalij pheasant, Nepal fulvetta and red-billed blue magpie. If you have the whole day, don't miss a hike to the secondary forest on the far side of the mountain.
- Missed the spiny babbler at Phulchoki? Shivapuri Wildlife Reserve could be your second chance. What it lacks in accessibility, it more than makes up by the number of species found within its forest. Make a weekend of it. Take a tent and a fellow bird enthusiast.

Royal Chitwan National Park

Fly or bus down to this lowland valley of sal and riverain forests. The 480 bird species recorded here is complemented by many modes. To see them—canoe, hike or take an elephant safari.

Kosi Barrage and Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Nepal's largest wetland attracts plenty of migratory species and just as many bird enthusiasts who vote this as their top birdwatching destination. Base for

the annual Migratory Birds Festival in February.

Royal Bardia National Park

With terrain similar to Chitwan, this park is rich in western lowland species. A two-day bus ride from the capital will get you within binocular distance of changeable hawk-eagles and Bengal floricans.

Sagarmatha National Park

The mountain scenery is unbeatable and forms a stunning backdrop to high altitude species like the Tibetan snowcock and alтай and alpine accentors. Jorsalle, the park entrance, is a day's walk from Lukla.

Annapurna Sanctuary and Modi Khola

Trek from Pokhara to the source of the Modi to the south-west located sanctuary. The dense rhododendron, oak and bamboo forests have half of Nepal's bird species, including a few endemic to the country.

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End of a nation

BELGRADE - The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ceased to exist on Tuesday, 4 February. What remains is a loose union between Serbia and tiny Montenegro, which together had comprised the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY).

The Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro had been adopted by both parliaments last week before the official proclamation on Tuesday. It agreed on EU sponsorship that provides for joint defence and foreign policy for the union, with the option of a referendum over full independence in three years. The union will start functioning in a month. Its president will be elected by a 120-member parliament comprising MPs from the Serbian and Montenegrin parliaments. The president will head a small government with five ministers. The 10,000 federal staff will be cut to 4,000.

The death of the FRY marks the end of the very idea of "Yugoslavia", meaning "a country of South Slav nations". Yugoslavia survived for nearly a century before the independence drives of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia in the early 90s where 200,000 people died. FRY was created by former president Slobodan Milosevic in April 1992 to hold together what was left of the former country. (IPS)

Global trade trends

UNITED NATIONS - The only way to reverse widespread enmity towards globalisation in developing countries is to make trade work as an engine of growth and human development, says a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report released last Thursday.

To achieve this, *Making Global Trade Work for People* recommends four basic principles is incorporated into the World Trade Organisation (WTO); trade must be seen as a means to an end not an end in itself, trade rules and standards should allow for diversity across regions and nations, countries' rights to protect their institutions and development priorities must be recognised, no country should be allowed to impose its institutional preferences on others.

The report called for a shift of focus from promoting trade liberalisation and market access to fostering development, because there is no compelling evidence that liberalisation leads to higher growth and poverty alleviation. The UNDP inquiry began after the debacle of the Seattle WTO meeting in 1999 that was interrupted by anti-globalisation protesters.

The combination of unfettered capitalism and rigged trade rules are playing a major role in developing countries falling further and further behind, says the report. UNDP administrator Malloch Brown pointed out that "a trade road without a commitment to building up infrastructure capacity will sell the South short." (IPS)

'Fortress Europe'

MADRID - Operation Ulysses, described as the first EU-wide initiative aimed at stemming the inflow of undocumented immigrants, began this week in the Mediterranean amidst criticism from activists who protest that the operation is a violation of human rights.

The Spanish designed project was presented to the Strategic Committee on Borders, Immigration and Asylum. It was approved in September 2002, and the rest of the EU countries joined the project, either as participants or observers. The operation's command post will be based in Algeciras, a southern Spanish port city on the Strait of Gibraltar.

Spain is one of the gateways used by thousands of undocumented immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa, East Europe and Asia. Hundreds drown annually in the attempt to cross the Strait of Gibraltar, often in precarious watercraft.

An Interior Ministry spokesman said the sea patrols are aimed at "combating illegal immigration and the mafias that traffic human beings" and would provide humanitarian aid in case of shipwrecks. But activists like José Antonio Gimbernat, the head of the Federation of Defence and Promotion of Human Rights, believes the operation attempts to "fortress Europe" without really addressing the problem of immigration and ignores human rights. (IPS)

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Oil lubricates America's war machine against Iraq, says economist Jeffrey D Sachs.



Crude reason to wage war

same way that the Reagan Administration supposedly brought down the "evil" Soviet empire.

Outside of America, almost nobody buys these arguments. Most believe that oil ranks at the top of America's list of motives. Short of the US national security archives suddenly falling open, we are unlikely to find a definitive account of the president's innermost thoughts. Moreover, different US officials certainly have different priorities. President Bush may focus on weapons of mass destruction, Wolfowitz may target democracy. Others may have their eyes firmly on the prize of Iraqi oil.

A more fruitful question than an inquiry into America's motives is how the US will act once war comes. Here we don't have to rely on second-guessing individuals. We can examine America's behavior in recent history.

Looking at the historical record, it is difficult to believe that the US will give the Middle East a democratic makeover. Today's Middle East is a construction of the US and Europe. Its despots and monarchs owe their positions to the

machinations and connivance of the West. Even if America goes off to war waving the banner of democracy, the results are likely to be less glorious. In the end, this will likely be a war for Iraqi oil.

Throughout the 20th century, Arab self-determination, democracy and economic reform took a back seat to oil. When the British inveigled Arab chieftains to fight on behalf of the British empire in World War I, the Arabs were not rewarded with sovereignty at the Great War's end, but with ongoing British and French suzerainty.

Whenever real democracy in the Middle East threatened American control over oil reserves, democracy was jettisoned. Consider the CIA-backed coup against Iranian Prime Minister Mussadeh. In 1951, Mussadeh nationalised Iran's oil industry, prompting a British boycott the next year and then US-backed intervention (which toppled and jailed the popular prime minister) in 1953.

American behavior in former Soviet Central Asia is equally vivid. Many in the Bush Administration point to its work

in this region as a showcase for how they will reshape the Middle East. Yet democracy has absolutely nothing to do with American policy in Central Asia, where US oil companies and diplomats trip over each other promoting deals in despotic Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

A good window on postwar US policy in Iraq can be found in key documents written by and for the Bush Administration before 11 September, when the analysis of the Middle East was much less infected by today's fears. Probably the most interesting document is a study entitled "Strategic Energy Policy Challenges of the 21st Century," produced by the James Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University in Texas and the Council on Foreign Relations.

The study makes clear two points. First, Iraq is vital to oil flows from the Middle East, as it sits on the second largest reserves in the world. The report agonises over the fact that for economic security reasons America needs Iraqi oil, but that for military security reasons the US can't allow Saddam to develop the oil. The implication seems clear—the US needs a new Iraqi regime for its energy security. Democracy is not mentioned anywhere in the study.

The Bush Administration may believe that it is going to war to fight for democracy in the Middle East, but US support for real democracy stands to be an early victim. Sadly, a war fought for oil will be one that further destabilises international politics and society, and undermines the true security of the US and the world. ♦

(Jeffrey D Sachs is a professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University in New York.)

Sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf argues that the United States is central to the values of the West. If it is attacked, the West is attacked.



The West vs The Rest

Whatever happens at the end of the day, the debate about a possible war with Iraq has brought to the surface fundamental issues on which no agreement exists, even among friends, but which will not go away and cannot be ignored. Indeed, if they are not resolved among those who cherish liberty, the price will be high.

There is a union of values called "the West". These enlightened values form the basis of the constitution of liberty and link the countries of North America, Europe and some other parts of the world. If a gap opens up between these countries insofar as the interpretation of Western values is concerned, this is bad news.

Defending our values requires instruments of power. Power may have become more diffuse in the contemporary world. Some even speak of "governance without government" because economic fortunes are in part determined without identifiable rulers. Yet traditional power has not gone away, and it is something more than the size of populations or their gross domestic products. Ultimately, power remains the ability to coerce.

In that sense, Europe has but modest capabilities. So, too, Japan, India, Asia's democracies and the democracies of Latin America. Europe must rely on alliances to exercise power, and these are likely to depend on America for some time to come. Much the same is true among the Asian and Latin American members of the constitution of liberty. In this area, more than in most, wishful thinking is a deadly mistake.

If basic values in which the West believes are threatened anywhere, we must either be prepared to defend them or to abandon them without a fight. Of course, military force is only one way to defend one's convictions, and its use must be measured but also timely. Appeasement at Munich in 1938—the "peace in our time" which really meant surrender to a vicious dictator—incited disaster. The eventual victory of democracy in 1945 came at a terrible price, and would not have come at all without American intervention.

All of this is relevant to today's crisis. The US is central to the values of the West, if it is attacked, we are all attacked. Iraq is a rogue state that has proved to

be a threat to its own people and to its neighbours. At least in part, it has been known to seek weapons of mass destruction. There must therefore be a presumption in favour of the US line of action, a point made forcefully and persuasively by Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

To be sure, this is not the last word on the subject. But it is the first word. More than that, it is the first principle that should guide the actions of those who share the West's values.

This raises two critically important sets of issues. The first is that democracies cannot go to war without at least the tacit consent of their peoples. Citizens must be persuaded that the reasons (especially for preemptive action) stand up to scrutiny. This is why—even at this late moment—more must be done to make the case for war to the public in those countries that are prepared to fight for freedom.

Likewise, action has to be sanctioned by international bodies. This is why UN inspections are vital. Talk about "regime change" is not enough. Talk about occupying Iraq for 18 months or so is intriguing but insufficient. The occupation of Germany—and of Japan—after WWII followed intense fighting for many years, coming at a point when the vanquished countries viewed their defeat as irreversible.

Even then, it took much longer than 18 months to establish viable democratic orders. There is also the question of whether anything in the texture of Iraqi society can serve as a foundation on which to establish the constitution of liberty in the Tigris/ Euphrates valley.

An unfortunate analogy used in the Iraq affair poses America as the chef and others, notably Europe, as the cleanup staff. America breaking the eggs and others cooking the omelet would be better. Asserting Western values in a unified way, and then assigning jobs to those who can do them best seems a more effective and dignified approach than the present spectacle of Americans moving forward almost blindly while Europeans try to look away. (© Project Syndicate)

(Ralf Dahrendorf, is a member of the British House of Lords, a former Rector of the London School of Economics and also a former Warden of St Anthony's College, Oxford.)

by BRIGITTE GRANVILLE



Local exodus, global market



Contrary to nativist scepticism, immigration's overall benefits outstrip the costs.

want to perform menial jobs. The history of much of the great migrations to the US in the 19th and 20th centuries fits this model. So do the Indo-Pakistani and Afro-Caribbean migrations to Britain that followed the UK's post-war imperial retreat, and the migrations of Algerians to France and Turks to Germany during the "economic wonder" of the 1960s.

But political leaders and citizens in the developed world are wrong to think that economic migration can be turned on and off like a spigot. Despite massive government efforts in Europe and the developed world to restrain immigration after the oil price shocks of the 1970s, labour inflows into the rich countries continued to increase in the 1980s to an annual average of about 1.4 million in Europe and 2.3 million in the US. The number of foreign-born workers increased throughout the OECD area (Japan being the sole exception). Foreign workers now

account for 25 percent of Australia's labour force, 10.3 percent in the US, and 5.3 percent in Europe.

These flows reflect the growing shortage of skilled workers and declining populations (particularly in Europe) that are beginning to bedevil the developed world. So Germany, if not warmly welcoming, finds itself soliciting Indian computer programmers, while Canada and other countries entice China's middle classes with a safe haven in which to invest just in case things go wrong at home. But this tolerance is confined to the skilled and the wealthy. No one wants to open the door to large-scale immigration by the poorest of the poor.

Underlying this discrimination, especially in Europe, is cultural aversion to immigrants from regions with alien cultures, which may account for the absence of widespread protests against the EU's eastward enlargement.

Indeed, the economic justification—that skilled immigrants tend to be net economic contributors while low-skilled workers impose a fiscal burden and threaten low-skilled natives—is weak. Immediate welfare costs, for example, can be passed on to the next generation, which will encompass these immigrants' children. More importantly, immigration's overall benefits outstrip the costs. In Britain, for example, the net annual contribution to GDP from immigrants is £2.5 billion, according to a recent Home Office report.

Facts, however, rarely pose an effective obstacle to hardened nativists, which is why governments worried about immigrants prefer to see some jobs go to people in poor countries rather than see poor people come to jobs in rich countries. Open international trading relations (especially allowing farmers in developing

countries greater access to rich countries' markets) is, of course, the best way to achieve this. Indeed, liberalisation of agriculture would provide a viable substitute for migration in many cases. Farm politics in Europe and America, however, make this virtually impossible.

Recent academic studies by Sergei Guriev of Moscow's New Economic School and Guido Freibel of the University of Toulouse expose a link between strict immigration rules and illicit trafficking in human beings, confirming the need for reform. If such criminal activity is to be

stopped, the despair found in poor countries must be reduced. Politicians in rich countries will be forced to strike a better balance between more liberal immigration policies and less trade protectionism.

History offers bitter lessons concerning the failure to meet this

challenge. The economic historian Harold James notes that the countries that turned toward aggressive militarism in the 1930s had previously been large suppliers of emigrants. Japan, Germany, and Russia all saw large outflows of their populations before the First World War, but these flows slowed to a trickle as countries like the US closed their doors to immigrants in the wake of the Great Depression that began in 1929.

In today's world, Africa and Asia are the world's biggest suppliers of migrants. If more jobs do not appear in these places, and doors to immigration remain shut, it should be no surprise that events born of frustration and hopelessness will occur with ever-greater frequency. Liberal immigration policies and the economic growth promised by globalisation are the keys to preventing dire conditions in poor countries from being translated into violence at home and abroad. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Brigitte Granville is Director of International Economics at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London.)

Sri Lanka talks into fifth round

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's peace talks, now entering its sixth month, could lose credibility unless human rights issues are pushed even higher up at the top of the agenda, rights activists warn.

"Unless human rights issues are discussed the credibility of peace talks would be at stake," says Dr Rohan Edirisinha, director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) a private think tank. As the fifth round of talks are held this week in Berlin, rights groups are pushing for a separate memorandum of understanding on human rights between the government and Tamil rebels, to be monitored by a committee of foreign and local experts. The current memorandum in force since early last year, covers the ceasefire and is monitored by a Norway-led committee.

The 7-8 February talks will take up the issue of human rights and allegations of large-scale conscription of children by the Tigers—who at the last round of talks said they were "not recruiting" youngsters and would not do so in the future. During a three-day visit to Sri Lanka last week, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) executive director Carol Bellamy won the latest assurances from the rebels that they would not recruit children. "I have been involved in these things long enough not to be naive about assurances, whether from the government or from non-state parties," she said.

CPA's Edirisinha, who will be in Berlin as a resource person in a government-rebel subcommittee on political structures, said the proposed human rights agreement would be a kind of charter covering issues like freedom of speech, expression, women and children's rights, and right to dissent. He said similar agreements have been implemented in other war-torn countries like Guatemala and El Salvador. (IPS)

India to shift to gasohol

NEW DELHI - The Indian government is trying to get car owners to drive green by using gasohol. Environmentalists say the move has come many years too late, but others hope it will lead to cleaner air and curb the country's huge oil import bill.

Gasohol, a mix of petrol and ethyl alcohol, has been mandatory in nine states and four centrally administered union territories. The government plans to widen the scope of the program later in the year. Debate in India on whether gasohol should be used, led to indecision for 30 years. Sceptics claim that the announcement that took effect 1 January has more to do with economic compulsions and domestic politics than just environmental concerns.

"Gasohol is a step in the right direction and should be welcomed, even if it has taken a long time to arrive," said Professor H S Mukunda, at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore. Studies have shown that a blend containing 5 to 10 percent of ethyl alcohol can reduce carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide by 10 to 30 percent. Sugarcane molasses is the raw material usually used in producing fuel-grade ethanol, a high-octane water-free alcohol. This is also why many see India's powerful sugar lobby behind the decision to introduce gasohol. (IPS)

Asian media threatened

Media watchdogs fear that the brazen manner of the latest purge could point to a hardening of official attitudes toward information flows in both the established democracies and their less-developed neighbours. "The situation in many parts of Asia remains bad, with China confirming its position as one of the biggest jailers of journalists, Bangladesh continuing to prove extremely dangerous, Vietnam still giving no place for press freedom, North Korea being as closed a society as one can imagine, Nepal ranking first in the wake of the harsh crackdown on the Maoist insurgency...Burma still a highly repressive regime, and regular attacks on press freedom in the Philippines," the World Association of Newspapers warned. Malaysia's Malaysiakini.com news portal was raided by police last month and its editor and staff questioned for printing a letter to the editor critical of the ruling party's youth wing. The country's media continues to be gagged when it comes to political reporting.

"Many governments stepped up and justified their repression using anti-terrorism as an excuse," reported Reporters Without Borders, the French-based media watchdog. "This included journalists accused, often without proof, of supporting the Maoists in Nepal." Thai journalists had their own problems at home, with political leaders drawing increasingly upon legal avenues to silence critics for the first time since the end of the military era in the late 1980s. There were 11 killings of reporters, making Asia a dangerous newsbeat to cover. As of December, another 53 reporters were being held in Asian prisons, led by Nepal with 18 inmates, Myanmar with 16 and China with 11. (Asia Times Online)

My baby girl

TOKYO - The latest statistics show a surprising trend in patriarchal Japan—a preference for baby girls. The National Institute of Population (NIP), in a report published every five years, found an increase in the choice of female children among married couples and single parents.

Younger couples, mostly wives, cite closer communication with daughters more than with sons as the most important reason for their preference. In 1998, 75 percent of single women and 64 percent of wives said they would prefer daughters compared to 22 percent among husbands. Experts say the trend will continue as Japan's birth rates continue to decline—there was a record decrease to 1.33 children per family in 2001. Smaller families are becoming the norm for economic and social reasons, not least among them being Japan's high living costs that have made education very expensive.

The desire for a daughter is stronger among single women who want a child out of wedlock says Takayo Yamamoto of the Hakuhodo Research Institute, a think tank. Analysts point out this will not alter Japan's demographics because it doesn't go further than expressing a choice. The next NIP survey is due this year. (IPS)

Aprecedented peace



Interview with political scientist Krishna Khanal in *Deshanter*, 2 February

देशान्तर सप्ताहिक

What is your assessment of the post-ceasefire political situation?

It wasn't unprecedented. Both the government and the Maoist rebels were under pressure to find a way out. The political trend that emerged after the dissolution of the parliament on 22 May last year has pushed the country towards further militarisation.

We need to understand that peace and political processes can progress together, like in Sri Lanka. In our case, after the dissolution of the parliament, local bodies were turned into political entities without popularly elected representatives. After the king took executive powers that sidelined other forces, there was a kind of political vacuum.

After 22 May, every development helped marginalise political institutions. This could have worked favourably for the Maoists because they are now in a position to share power directly with the palace. The palace benefits by taking credit for resolving the problem.

Does this mean political parties will be completely sidelined?

The ceasefire declared by the government and the Maoist rebels has exposed only one part of the equation. Future politics can't be confined between the palace and the Maoists. Popular opinion towards democratic rights creates space for political parties. They should not have allowed the derailment of the constitutional process. They failed. During the talks, both the king and the Maoists will need support from the political parties to strengthen their respective positions. The role of the political parties is indispensable to negotiations.

What broader issues need to be addressed now?

First, there is a need for life to get back to normal. Second, people displaced by the insurgency need to be rehabilitated and destroyed infrastructures must be rebuilt. Only then should we move towards more complex issues like the formation of an interim government and holding elections to the constituent assembly.

Democratic forces are poised to gain while opting for a constituent assembly. If we had a parliament, we could have a constituent assembly simply by passing a resolution. But instead what we have is a vacuum that complicates the constitutional and technical aspects.

How likely is it that a future roundtable conference will end in chaos?

You must keep an open mind to resolve armed conflict. So, the conference should not be limited as an exercise to wield power. If that happens, Nepali society will look for other alternatives. It's still unclear how issues brought up at the conference will be resolved. We must not neglect the issue of disarming the rebels. We lack credible modalities.

Adieu to Shrestha

Kantipur, 3 February
Yubaraj Ghimire

कान्तिपुर

The Indian comic villain, Ajit, orders the death of a woman and her lover, neglecting to first check their identities. After the wrong couple has been dispatched of, he yells, "Sorry!" Unlike Ajit, the Maoists have yet to muster courage to take responsibility for the murder last month of the chief of the Armed Police Force, Krishna Mohan Shrestha, his wife, Nudup and a bodyguard.

The Shresthas' murder exposed the Maoist double standard of blaming the government for killing people under the guise of fake encounters, thereby violating the Geneva Convention. Nudup Shrestha was a civilian. Her only 'crime' was to spread the light of education.

The ceasefire declared soon after the murders have already witnessed attempts to derail proposed talks. The alleged meeting between King Gyanendra and the Maoist leaders seem to have been aimed at weakening the authority of Minister Narayan Singh Pun. The dialogue "shop-keepers" even referred to Pun as a clown and claimed they were instrumental in organising the earlier meeting. Of course, there are forces inside and out of the country that don't want to see this problem resolved.

We should appreciate the efforts made by Pun so far. But success is not likely unless there is mass participation and understanding. The king, political parties and the Maoists must be made aware of attempts to derail the talks. The success of these talks should be a homage to the Shresthas.

No more orphans

Kantipur, 6 February

कान्तिपुर

Nearly two weeks after the demise of their parents, the three daughters of the chief of Armed Police Force Krishna Mohan Shrestha and his wife Nudup have a message for us. Namita, Kripa and Kriti (*from left to right in picture, above*) have only one prayer: "Let the ceasefire lead to a lasting peace in the country so



no more children become orphans like us." Namita and Kripa are students at universities abroad unlike Kriti who is in Kathmandu the morning unidentified gunmen killed their parents and bodyguard. Namita said all three sisters were trying to cope with the big void created by the loss of their parents. "We want to transform grief into power and realise our parents' dreams," she said. The Shrestha family also wants a more thorough investigation into the murders, and also want their father's contribution to the motherland be recognised and remembered.

No refuge

Nepal Samacharpatra, 26 January
Kul Mani Gyawali

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Displaced by the Maoist insurgency, Nanda Bahadur Rawal of Jumla faces numerous hardships in Dharmashala, a hill station in India's Himachal Pradesh. "The situation had become unbearable so I left home to save my life," says 14-year old Rawal, shivering from the cold.

Rawal comes from Kataka Sundari village, a two-hour walk from district headquarters at Khalanga. He was a fourth grader back in the village school before migrating to India with a group of 20 other young men to escape forced recruitment in the Maoist militia. They are scared to openly admit that they left their villages because of the rebels and are hesitant to talk to strangers. "We were looted of what little we had by the Maoists," says Santa Bahadur Buda, a grade seven student from Rawal's school. "We could have starved to death."

The majority of those who were forced to leave their village can be seen selling garments in Gorakhpur, Hariyana and Punjab in India. Pale and thin, Kul Bahadur Buda looks much older than his 37 years. He worries constantly about his wife and three children back home in Jumla. "I had to flee my village to save my life," he said. Buda has met some boys as young as 12 who have left their homes to avoid Maoist recruitment.

'Meeting point'

Rajdhani, 6 February

राजधानी

"We must look for a point of agreement within the parliament. The monarchy cannot usurp this function," president of the Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala said at a mass meeting at Dhangadi. His statement was a response to Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand's comment that the monarch should be the pivot of nationhood.

Koirala said both sides were attempting to diminish the constitution in favour of a constituent assembly. By keeping people in the dark he said ground was being laid for an 'evil constitution'.

Koirala made clear the Nepali Congress' position stressing they would, "support an interim government, a roundtable discussion or a constituent assembly created from within the present constitutional framework."

Who are they?

Aparanha, 31 January

अपराह

By pushing aside veteran peace personalities like Daman Nath Dhungana, Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Sudip Pathak, Shyam Shrestha and Malla K Sundar, two new faces hogged the limelight in the latest peace overtures between the government and Maoists. D R Lamichhane (*below, right*) and Birendra Shrestha 'Jhapali' (*below, left*) helped dialogue coordinator Minister Narayan Singh Pun make contact with the Maoist leadership. Jhapali runs Miteri Hospital at Bagh Bazar in the capital, which had been under security personnel surveillance since last year and was even raided for treating two wounded Maoists guerrillas. Police were withdrawn only after the declaration of ceasefire during the Deuba administration in August 2001. Lamichhane was the editor of *Chhanbin* weekly, which has ceased publication. After the vertical split in the CPN (UML) he joined the splinter ML faction led by Bamdev Gautam where he was the point man for contacts between Gautam and the Maoists. Lamichhane, who is not known for his attire or personal hygiene, has been seen in a suit and brandishing a mobile phone in the past few months. But not even that hinted at his mission to forge a ceasefire for the nation.



MAN BHARACHARA

A family mourns

Kantipur, 2 February

कान्तिपुर

Khineshwori Adhikari's world shattered when her husband Ganesh Man Adhikari was killed by the Maoist rebels a month ago. She hasn't stopped crying since, and her three children, Mandira (16), Mohan (15) and Manoj (13) seem lost and without hope. They are worried about their futures, and say Nepali children like them need to be looked after. "Now that we are fatherless, who will educate us?" ask the children. All were students at the local Himalaya High School in Khadbari.

Ganesh Man Adhikari, a 39-year-old school teacher, was abducted by the rebels on 23 December and was found dead two weeks later. The reason for the abduction and murder was not disclosed. "We could not find the body in time and the last rites were delayed," says his wife. Adhikari's parents, 70-year-old Ram Bahadur and his wife Ram Kumari Adhikari, are grief-stricken. "His face keeps appearing in my mind," says his father. His mother whispers, "It is my time to die but my young son got killed."

The huge responsibility of rearing and educating three children now falls on Khineshwori's frail shoulders. Manoj, the youngest child, is ill. He slips in and out of consciousness and the family cannot afford to take him to a doctor. "I cannot imagine a way out of the mess my life has turned into," she says. She hopes the government will offer compensation, but fears for the security of her family. Nobody from the government has stepped forward to offer compensation or solace to the bereaved family except the chief district officer Hari Krishna Khatriwada, who paid them a condolence visit.

Adhikari was a teacher at Pathibhara Hedangna, north of Khadbari for the past decade. The family says he had been struggling for a transfer to a safer area after the insurgency flared in Sankhuwasabha district because he could not afford to leave his job. He was returning home after school when he got abducted along with two other teachers and a post office employee. According to his brother, Gopal Bahadur Adhikari, a group of 30-armed rebels overpowered them. The others were released unconditionally, but Ganesh Man was found dead two weeks later. He was shot twice and stabbed several times with khukuris. [After this article appeared, several donors stepped forward to help with the education of the Adhikari children. -Ed]



From l to r: Mandira, Mohan, Manoj and Khineshwori outside their home.

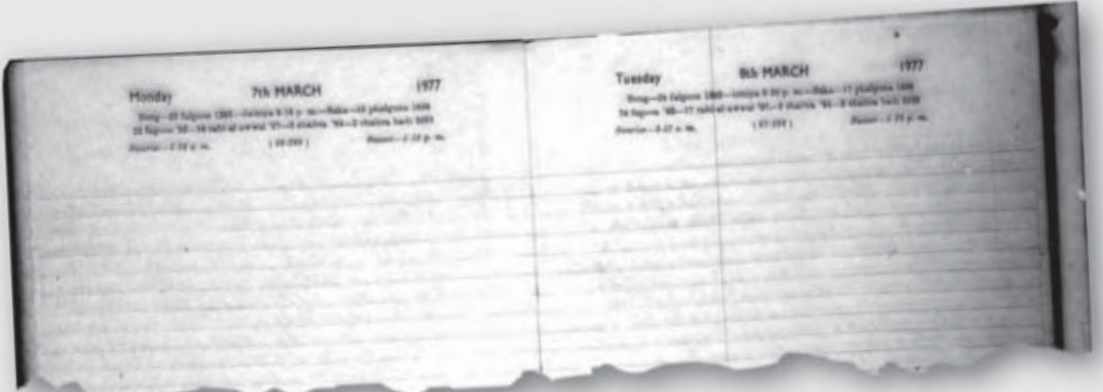
SARAO

Back at Sundarijal >27

"Keeping alive the fire of democracy..."



After three blank pages with no entries (and no explanation for it), BP fills the empty space with a long write-up on 10 March. He remembers his mother, the dignity and generosity she displayed till the end. BP reads between the lines of news items in Gorkhapatra, and concludes that lobbying in the US, Britain and India would help the cause of democracy in Nepal.



7-8-9 March, 1977

[No entries]

10 March, 1977

Sundarijal

In the morning, the pathological report of my sputum culture was handed over to me. Nothing was detected. Then why this bleeding? I know I am not suffering from any serious illness, but the presence of blood in my sputum which I detect every day in the morning is inexplicable. I am losing weight also, and I feel weak, and my pulse doesn't seem to beat the normal uniformity. Sometimes it misses and sometimes it becomes faint—just for a second or two—and misses just one or two heartbeats. I ascribe all this to my psychological condition. But the manifestation of blood in cough can't be psychological. GM told me this morning that I looked very bright and that I never looked as healthy in the last year at Varanasi. Then he makes a general statement that psychological tensions and anxiety doesn't produce a physical reaction.

I am full of mother's memory today. She was a most noble lady. What gave distinction to her personality was her sense of pride and dignity. She was not a very educated person in the academic sense, but she had seen a lot of things in life, undergone such experiences imparted by the turn of the wheels of fortune—ups and downs and had thus experience life in the raw. This gave authority to her voice. She never said a thing which was trite or not supported by her own

experience. Hence she appeared refreshing and original. Her association with father taught her the value of keeping on an adornment of existence—suffering for a cause—and this gave her a dignity which is a rare commodity in man's character. I remember her last illness, before she left for Biratnagar, her tranquility had acquired almost a character of spiritualism. She was least spiritual in the usual sense. But even in her deathbed she was profoundly calm. Even when she vomited a lot of blood and passed more blood in stool, she was profusely perspiring and was about to collapse. She faintly smiled and murmured, "I am so sorry that I have become so helpless, causing you all unnecessary worry." Mother, excuse me for my shortcomings. I know I don't have to pray to you for it. Your unbounded charity and love have automatically pardoned my crimes even before I committed them. You see no more, but I vow this moment in your sacred and loving memory that I will try to be a good person according to your light, a light which you have handed over to me.

Since yesterday we are not being given the Rising Nepal. Is it by design, or inefficiency or mistake? I am inclined to think that two day's papers have been purposely withdrawn because they have contained matters favourable or at least encouraging to our cause. GM thinks that such matters would not be published in the papers in the first place.

Since Gorkhapatra has been given to us which is almost a Nepali version of the Rising Nepal and vice versa, he is inclined to believe that it was a case of inefficiency. Rising Nepal carries comparatively better coverage of international news. If the paper was withheld then we will be totally in the dark about what is happening in the international world. We don't know anything about what is happening in our case at the home front. Yesterday Gorkhapatra published a

scathing denunciation of a resolution passed by "a certain Indian party" (the resolution obviously refers to us) by a spokesman of the central committee of the "Gauṇ Pharka Abhiyan", saying that it was unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of Nepal and that the culprits would not be allowed to go scot free, etc etc. In today's editorial of the G Patra, the same denunciation is made almost in the same language—only that portion is omitted in which the spokesman of the Gauṇ Pharka has categorically said that they would not be allowed to go scot free. From the editorial we learnt that the Janata party had passed the resolution about us. We are happy that our people have not forgotten us. We don't know the intention of the king. There is no indication that he is ready for a talk—no indication that our grand gesture would be reciprocated. We are being given creature comforts, but are deprived of normal facilities available to prisoners like interviews, correspondence... books and newspapers of our choice. It is psychological torture. In today's paper there is a statement by a government official about detainees saying that there are only 55 in number, out of which about 10 have been taken into custody only recently (that means us) and that they are given normal facilities, including medical. He has mentioned medical facilities but he hasn't said what other facilities are provided to the detainees. It appears there have been comments in foreign press about the condition of imprisonment, hence the necessity of an explanation. What would impress the king is propaganda in the USA and the UK. I don't know what our people are doing about it or if they are in a position to mount a propaganda campaign in those places. Propaganda in India wouldn't be effective although it does serve the purpose of keeping alive the fire of democracy in Nepal.

by KAMESH REGMI

FICTION

Dreams Winner of British Council Short Story Competition (15-18)

The sound of my hoarse breathing was plainly audible in the stark silence of the night. I glanced over my shoulders. The rapidly advancing silhouettes that I could see in the dim moonlight struck me for the time of the impending danger. My lungs were burning and my heart pounding like a gong. Yet my legs were running. I was running for my life—the Maoists were after me. I would not have given up running if I hadn't tripped over a stone. The words that were reaching out for my jugular moments ago were now dangling over my eyes. Death was imminent, I knew. The satanic looks in their merciless eyes infected me with terror. With a fierce swing of the sword moments later, a man ripped my thumping heart open.

My body violently writhed in painful convulsions and I rolled off my bed, landing on the cold dusty floor. As I woke up with a start, I gasped for breath. A real nightmare it was! Another day was already on. After a wash, shave and quick dressing, I sprinted to the breakfast table. Mother had laid buttered bread and tea. As I dug in hurriedly, she asked, "Son, have you found a job yet?"

"No, I haven't got hold of anything worthwhile yet... I'm leaving now," I promptly answered as I munched the last bite. Before long, I was off on a mission.

The towering concrete expanses filtered the sunshine down onto the hard brick pavement already bustling with morning rush-hour activity, uncannily breathing out a palpable silence. I had a hunch that I would finally "get hold of something worthwhile" that day. My heart was already pounding in nervous excitement.



The office I went to was a big one, with glass doors. As I noiselessly walked down the spotless corridor, I looked back guiltily at the footprints my unpolished shoes made. I looked around; everybody seemed absorbed in their own work. I stopped in front of an anteroom where many other jobseekers were quietly waiting. I too found a seat for myself. It was only after two long hours of patient waiting that my name was called out.

As I entered the room, I told myself, "Have a confident air. Don't fear. The job's yours, thumbs up!" In the well-furnished room, a middle-aged man seated on a high chair was playing with his paperweight. I greeted him with utmost politeness and also

managed a wide grin. "Oh, hello young man! Please take a seat, Mr ...," was his hearty greeting. "Abhishek. Abhishek Sharma, sir," I answered with all the confidence I could muster. Then started the interview. I boldly faced each question. We were just coming to an end when the telephone rang. Its clamour sounded rather eerie, bearing commiseration to an unhappy individual, whom it was destined to keep jobless. I could easily imagine an obese minister ordering my would-have-been (but not to be) boss. Really, as soon as the man held the receiver against his ears, his voice suddenly became submissive. He bore a down-like countenance, showing his meek compliance. I knew what the answer would be, so I took off without looking back.

It was utterly frustrating. Frustration had haunted me since I graduated. And now, I was tired of routinely fluctuating between hope and despair. My eyes kept staring at the clouds for an elusive silver lining. I could see none. Desperation goaded me to wander aimlessly. And as the hot noonday sun scorched the back of my neck it added insult to my torment. The street was now deafeningly noisy. Honking cars, barking people, roaring engines—everything, everybody seemed so disorderly. As I wandered down the street, a young boy caught my eye. Sunken eyes, unkempt hair, torn clothes and a stack of newspapers resting over his folded hands. The young street hawk was shouting aloud, "Daily Times! Daily Times!" He approached me and asked in a sore voice, "Oh brother! Do you want to buy one? It's just two rupee a piece." I

tossed him a two rupee coin and got a newspaper; the boy walked down the street and soon faded from my sight.

I scanned the newspaper. Hackneyed news prevailed once again. Every news item failed to impress me. But there was a photo of a minister giving a speech that caught my eye. A nondescript caption followed it, but there was something special about that photograph which drew my eyes. I did not know what, but I could really feel the scene of the masses, the noise, cheers and clapping.

My mind ran down a vista of imagination as I, the Honourable Prime Minister, strode across the stage to the podium, the crowd burst into a rapturous applause. I was a special invitee to the program and was to deliver a speech. My eyes rolled across the hall. It was full of indistinguishable pink blobs of people's faces. "Am I dripping with nervous sweat?" I asked myself. No. So I started with trite civility. A deep cough. Then my voice cracked. "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen," I continued, "Nepal and her future rest on our shoulders. We are the flagbearers of our country, and today she desperately needs us. Our poverty stricken nation is plagued by anti-nationals, terrorists and money mongers." My voice reached a commanding intensity and the punch of my fist in the air added electricity. I could see the crowd completely mesmerised. "The threshold of the 21st century has been crossed, yet we are lagging a lot behind the other nations. Development has almost come to a standstill and there are a number of stumbling stones to be crossed. It is only possible through the

collective effort of us all Nepali people, and for that, we must begin at the grassroots level," I went on, now in full flow. My inciting rhetoric continued for quite a while, leaving the crowd enthralled. The hall once again resounded with a thunderous applause.

A shrill police siren pierced the stillness of my vain reverie; my mind landed back on the real world. I could see a police jeep escorting a sleek black limousine carrying a minister. "Oh! What a life he has! Limo, money—black or white, who cares! If only I could be a minister," I sighed. The sky was reddening in the evening twilight and on the street was sparse activity. I was strolling around when I realised I had not had anything but breakfast. My starving belly dragged my weary legs home, where I stuffed myself with whatever I could find in the kitchen cupboard. After I was full, I succumbed to the day's fatigue. But I did not have a dream, nor did anyone or anything disturb my nap.

When I woke up with a long yawn, the frustrating day played back into my mind. Were my dreams at the horizon, near enough to be seen but too far to be reached? Would my well-preserved certificates decay before they finally came to any use? An emphatic "No" rang in my head, not if I go abroad. Or else, I will rot in this country and nobody will even smell it. "Yes, my future's somewhere else!" I thought as I scrambled into the warmth of my blanket. The clock lazily rang 11 and sleep crept in. Peaceful sleep till late morning was what I wished upon a star, and this, at least, was to finally come true. The next day was a Nepal bandh! ♦

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



There is no alternative to a constituent assembly. It should be made an unconditional agenda of the peace talks.

- Nar Hari Acharya of the Nepali Congress in Rajdhani on 5 February.

हिमाल

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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** an exhibition 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.
- ❖ **Contemporary Japanese Architecture 1985-1996** 11-20 February at Nepal Art Council Gallery, Baber Mahal.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Obesity Mastery Program** 8 February at Hardic Lifestyle Clinic, Puchowk, 551282. Email: tarama@enet.com.np
- ❖ **Close-up Hits FM Music Awards 2059** 4.30 PM on 8 February at Birendra International Convention Centre.
- ❖ **The Current State of the Bagmati River** Environmental talk by Friends of the Bagmati at 3PM on 9 February, Lamzimpat Gallery Café. Email: friendsofthebagmatinepal@yahoo.com
- ❖ **British Council Cyber Fair 2003** 10AM-4PM, 9 February at the British Council. Free. 410798
- ❖ **Valentine Date with Nabin K Bhattarai** 11AM onwards 14 February, The Cyber Kitchen, Jawalakhel. 434554, 241408
- ❖ **Constitutional Reforms** GAA's forum at the Nepal Tourism Board on 9 February, 1-3PM. Speakers: Bharat Raj Upretti, Dr Krishna Hachhethu and Shrish Rana. Moderated by Dr Nobel Kishore Rai.

OTHERS

- ❖ **Oxygen combined with aromatherapy** Only at Sanjivini Oxygen Parlour, Thamel. Email: kjoshi@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Jatra Saturday Matinee Offer** Free beer at Jatra, Thamel with every balcony ticket of the Saturday afternoon show at Jai Nepal Cinema.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Nima Rumba, Aasirwad Boys** and dance party at Millenium Gateway, Kantipath on 7 February, 1-9PM. Entry Rs 250.
- ❖ **The Steam Injuns with Abhaya** 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 Rum Doodle, Thamel. 414336
- ❖ **Friday Nites** at Jatra with The Strings. Free entry, Thamel
- ❖ **Gaines** Traditional Nepali music at Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 680083/ 80
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective Live** 7.30 PM on 14 February at the Jazz Bar, Entry Rs 400 with a free drink, discounted menu. Shangrila Hotel, Lazimpat. Contact Aishwarya: 412999

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.

FOOD

- ❖ **Kumari Restaurant and Bar** Mixed menu, imported drinks at affordable prices. Putalisadak. 417958, 422666
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali Lunch** at Patan Museum Café 11AM-4PM. 25 percent off for Summit Club Members. 526271
- ❖ **Raclette and Fondue** at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- ❖ **Newari Bhoj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant. Lazimpat. 413874
- ❖ **Newari food festival** from 15-23 February at the Summit Hotel, Kupondole.
- ❖ **Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza** at Stupa View Restaurant and Terrace, Boudha. 480262
- ❖ **Rox 2nd Anniversary** 8PM onwards on 8 February. Unlimited snacks and drinks Rs 999 pp, Rs 777 CATH members. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 680083/ 80
- ❖ **Sekudu Saanjh** Friday BBQ for Rs 555 plus tax per person, one free beer or soft drink. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **The Great Godavari Getaway Special** weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner. Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** \$55 per person per night (tax included) for accommodation, meals, arrival and departure transfers from Bijaypur, walks, bar snacks and swimming. 01-361500
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights** 15 minutes from Budhanilkantha for weekends, team building courses and conferences. Rs 1850 pp (dinner and breakfast) Rs 925 per child 5-14 years Website: www.escape2nepal.com Email: shivapuriheights@escape2nepal.com, info@escape2nepal.com

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

NEPALI WEATHER VIS-06-02-2003 04:00 GMT

From here on, expect temperatures to climb steadily. A sky cleared of haze by past rains means higher daytime temperatures which has burnt off the persistent tarai fog. Minimum temperatures will take some time to pick up. Having said that, this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows the arrival of yet another front which is going to just graze Kathmandu Valley over the weekend. Rain and snow in western Nepal. The other low pressure area over eastern Nepal will pull the front over us, temporarily lowering the maximum temperature and bring drizzles to Kathmandu into early next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
19-03	19-03	18-04	18-03	19-02



BOOKWORM

Birds of the Indian Subcontinent Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp
Oxford
Rs 3,600
This weighty tome is the first comprehensive identification guide to 1,300 species found in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. It has sections on habitats, climate and conservation. There are distribution maps, over 150 colour plates and a detailed bibliography.

Birds of Nepal with reference to Kashmir and Sikkim Robert L. Fleming, Sr, Robert L. Fleming, Jr and Lain Singh Bangdel
Adarsh, 2002
Rs 1,275

The classic guide could be described as a 35-year-summary of bird study in this country. In field guide form, this book describes nearly a tenth of the known birds in the world and is valuable especially for the Himalayan region. Data and illustrations are placed on facing pages to help quick identifications.

Birds of Nepal Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp
Prakash Book Depot, 2000
Rs 1,275
Concise text covers identification, voice, habitat, altitudinal range, distribution and status. Introduction has information on birdwatching and conservation in Nepal. Detailed colour plates with text on facing pages for at-a-glance references makes this book invaluable in the field.

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

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Hits 91.2

Close-up Hits FM Music Awards 2059
Saturday, 8 February 4:30 pm onwards

Live on Nepal Television and Hits FM 91.2
Streaming video also on:
www.nepalnews.com www.hitsfm.com.np

Khushi is old wine in a new bottle. The remake of a South Indian hit, this is a love story directed by S J Suryah, who also wrote the script and screenplay. The film stars Fardeen Khan (Karan) and Kareena Kapoor (Khushi) as two college students who destiny throws together. Of course they hate each other at first sight, but eventually become friends. However, neither is willing to admit romantic feelings for the other. They must learn to listen to their hearts and forego their obstinacy and ego if they—and we—are to have a happy ending.

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Online booking www.jainepal.com

BBC on FM 102.4

Mon-Fri	0615-0645	BBC World Today
Sat	0615-0645	BBC Reporting Religion
Sun	0615-0645	BBC Agenda
Daily	2045-2115	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा
Sun-Fri	0740-0800	एकैछिन् (रेडियो पब्लिक)
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 (षष्ठ्याचारविहृद सहकार्य)
Sat	2000-2030	कूटनीतिक सञ्च

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MUSIC



A glittering who's who of Nepal's music industry will all be present at the Birendra International Convention Centre on Saturday, 8 February for the Close-up Hits FM Music Awards 2059—Nepal's swadeshi answer to the Grammys.

Hits FM has been involved in promoting artists in the Nepali music industry since the station first started broadcasting in 1996. They are credited for "making" many Nepali pop icons, including the King of Nepali Pop, Nabin K Bhattarai. The rapid growth of the Nepali music industry is mirrored in the steady increase of award categories. What started out with seven has slowly expanded this year to 15, including Folk Record of the Year, Folk Album of the Year and

Closeup Hits 91.2 music AWARDS 2059
BIRENDRA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION HALL
SATURDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2003 AT 4:00 P.M.

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This year's hits

The quality of nominees for this year's Hits FM Music Awards shows that Nepali music has come of age.

Best Song in a Foreign Language. While the last comes as a surprise, what doesn't is the fact all the "Foreign Language" songs are in English.

This year the enormously popular 1974 AD leads the rolls with five nominations including Song of the year, Album of the Year and Record of the Year. The Seasons and Kunti Moktan follow their lead with three nods each. A special presentation is to be made for a significant contribution to Nepali music.

Ever since 1998 when Hits hosted their first show—notably sans major sponsorship—it has perhaps become the most credible music award in an industry awash with dime-a-dozen promotional events. What sets Hits apart is an extensive and exhaustive "democratic" method for releasing their nomination catalogue. The two basic criteria for songs to be in the running are registration with Hits FM 91.2 and date of release within the year of the awards.

"Music comes for the heart, and Hits FM Music Awards have become the pulse of modern Nepali music," says Jeevan Shrestha of Hits FM. "The awards, like good wine, gets better with age."

Until Radio Nepal was established in 1950, for most Nepalis music was an ephemeral affair. It was not until 1965 that the radio launched the careers of artistes like Hari Bahadur Ranjitar and Bhairab Bahadur. Nepalis got their first taste of Adhunik with Bachu Kailash, the first Nepali singer to record his own LP. Until then folk songs were the logical medium to express individual and underclass angst and anger. The decade starting 1968 was definitive for Adhunik with lots of experimen-



1974 AD

tal, avant garde music being composed by people like Nati Kaji, Amber Gurung and Gopal Yonjan. Now this genre has the maturity, self-confidence and world class professionalism to attract young fans who have had enough exposure to tell the good from the bad, the original from a copy. And the best thing to happen to Nepal's music industry has been the arrival of private FM stations.

Today, music is a Rs 150 million industry, with some 250 albums of all genres from folk to native rock being released every year. Gone are the days when aspiring singers lurked outside Radio Nepal studios in Singha Darbar, waiting to be summoned for a live studio session. Now it's possible to write a song, have it arranged, recorded and delivered to the nearest radio station within a working week. Of course, a

single or an album does not make a star. That takes talent, perseverance and lastly, a good media platform. And nothing can replace the reach of FM radio. And the awards help by rewarding talent with celebrity status.

Those not fortunate enough to wangle an invitation to the awards this year can watch the event broadcast live on Nepal Television, Hits FM 91.2, www.nepalnews.com and www.hitsfm.com.np.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Too good to be true



If you have been tuning into the airwaves lately, it will have dawned on you that with peace in the air, this country is going through something of a consumerist boom. Fast-moving consumer goods like motorcycles have taken a quantum leap because of promos like this one: "Buy a Flying Horse Four-stroke Motorcycle and get another one free." (Fine print: Conditions apply, offer valid until stocks last, first come first sold, employees of Flying Horse and readers of this column not eligible.)

Kwality Heavy Industries is manufacturing coconut crunchies and golden cracker biscuits with 100 percent indigenous content that have attained ODC standards in terms of kwantity and kwality. As a matter of fact, statistics show that this country has become a global leader in the production and consumption of junk food.

All this, of course, is good news for Nepali consumers who have benefited from some of the lowest-priced cheese balls and prawn crackers among countries in the SAARC region. In fact Nepali junk food is the only one that has been awarded ISO 9002 certification by the International Maritime Association, which means strict quality control in the manufacturing process guarantees it to be totally devoid of any nutritional value whatsoever.

Competition is now so fierce that some manufacturers intent on establishing brand loyalty are offering all kinds of incentives to make you buy their stuff:

Freshly-baked bricks and tiles from your Neighbourhood Brick Klin Pvt Ltd are selling like hot cakes. Buy one, break open brick and be the lucky winner of a DVD player, refrigerator or microwave tower.

Scratch 'n' sniff 'n' win. Scrape the card in every six-pack of chicken-flavoured seasoning for Cock-a-doodle-do Instant Noodles, tell us what you smell and get a job in His Majesty's Government civil and military service.

Get your mum to buy a year's supply of Mustard Gas brand cooking oil and we will personally ensure that you will come Board First in the forthcoming SLC exams, or your money back.

Buy a 500 kg bundle of Darasingh Steel iron rods, mail us this coupon with an essay entitled "Why I Believe Darasingh is the Iron Rod For Me", and win a 24-karat gold medallion.

Special World Cup Cricket 2003 Offer. For every super-flat TV you buy, get a free Pajero. If you think this offer is too good to be true, you're right. It is too good to be true. We just said it to get your attention, you moron.

Valentine's Day Bonanza. Show her how much you love her by buying her 12 sacks of ISO 9002 certified Grade 55 Mt Everest Brand Portland Cement and get a lodging-fooding free two-night stay for two at the honeymoon suite of the Machhapuchare Viewpoint Hotel in Pokhara.

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NEPALI SOCIETY

Going by the book

Homraj Acharya's native village in Kapilbastu district is called Buddhi. Although the word means "intellect" in Nepali, there wasn't much for the children of Buddhi to read. Children would go to school to learn to read and write, but after graduation there was really nothing for them to read and no reason to write. Many lapsed back into illiteracy. Today, Homraj Acharya is working on his PhD at the American University in Washington DC, and he decided to do something about it by starting a unique project called "Books in Every Home".

Homraj (with children in his native village, below) uses his own savings and money from fund-raising dinners at Nepali restaurants to support a pilot scheme to provide reading materials to schools back in Kapilbastu. The experiment has proved so successful that he now wants to expand its reach to five other districts. "It is important to show that if you want to make a difference, you have to be ready to put in your own resources and energy," Homraj told us while passing through Kathmandu on his way to Kapilbastu with another load of books.

The problem is that the project has become so successful that

Books in Every Home now needs more funds to expand. Which probably means more fund-raising dinners in various Nepali restaurants in the DC area. Homraj has already cancelled his own cable TV subscription and isn't ordering anymore takeout pizzas so he can stash the saved-up money into his book fund. "It may not sound like much, but it adds up and you can do a lot with little in Nepal," he says.

How do you make people love books, get hooked to reading so they can unwrap the knowledge in them? Books in Every Home tries to bring books with appropriate information and relevant facts to villagers. The project publishes a quarterly booklet called *Desh ko Abaj* containing all kinds of information on everything from bee-keeping to short stories, poetry or chapters on the importance on safe drinking water. The material is written by readers themselves who want to share their ideas. The latest issue contains an

article *Man ko Biraha* by a teashop owner, and his neighbours are impressed he can write so well. The books are distributed through schools, and readers range from boys and girls in grade five to 70-year-old grandmothers.

Besides *Desh ko Abaj*, the project also circulates books in a mobile village library system organised by readers' groups called *Pathak Samuha*. Members gather every fortnight to discuss what they liked, why and how they could apply some of the things they have read about in their daily lives. Some members take the books home to read to their children at bedtime.

Says Homraj, "We bring books to people rather than take people to books." And what could be a better place to spread enlightenment than in a village called Buddhi, in the district where the Buddha was born. ♦



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