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RAMYATA LIMBU

At dusk on Sunday the Bouddhanath stupa glowed with light from 50,000 butter lamps, arranged in a crescent to symbolise the cosmos, each flame was a prayer for peace.

This was the way (see pic, left) 500 Nepal-based expats expressed their opposition to war—whether it is the impending war on Iraq, or Nepal's own domestic conflict. This symbolic gesture for unity and peace came as long-term expat residents of Kathmandu from Australia, the US, Britain and Canada are torn between leaving and staying in the land they love.

One American who has lived in Kathmandu for 25 years told us: "Because of the Maoists we wanted to leave, but after 9-11 we think, hey, we are not going to be more secure anywhere else in the world so might as well just stay. And now with the ceasefire we hope we can once more see the beautiful and peaceful Nepal that brought us here."

With the royal massacre and the increasingly brutal insurgency, many expats in Kathmandu had been leaving. Some others who might have stayed decided the visa hassles were just not worth it. But for the die-hard Nepalophile, despite the

overcrowding, pollution and the fears of the future, there is still no other place like Kathmandu. They have stayed on, hoping and praying that things will take a turn for the better. The lamp-lighting at Bouddha last weekend was a prayer that the ceasefire will hold and lead to lasting peace.

"Rather than moving from Shangri-la to Shangri-la, you stop, call a country home and try to help it through a difficult period," says another expat, who like many interviewed for this article asked that their names not be used. "Of course, there's a feeling that the heat's slowly being turned up here, but at a point, one has to make a stand in your birth or adopted country. My home base is Nepal and that's where my heart is."

Despite Nepal's deteriorating economy, an IT expert from Europe is still keen to share his ideas with Nepali entrepreneurs. "It's low risk because you're investing knowledge and ideas, not physical infrastructure," he says. "But I can understand the concerns of people who have invested in construction and equipment."

Continued ➞ p6

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 74

Q. Is the US right in insisting on war against Iraq despite UN inspections?

Total votes: 963

Weekly Internet Poll # 75. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Is there a need for outside mediation in the Nepal peace process?



The verdict

BHAGIRATH YOGI

Both sides have claimed victory in the London High Court's dismissal on 21 February of an application by seven former Gurkhas for equal pension with British soldiers.

It may be politically incorrect in this day and age to allow recruitment of soldiers into foreign armies, or to pay foreign soldiers less than its own soldiers but the Nepali economy depends on remittances from its Gurkhas in the Indian and British armies, and the verdict means recruitment will continue.

In his decision last Friday, Justice Sullivan said the difference in pay and pensions were not "disproportionate or irrational" given the differing standards of living in Nepal and Britain. But he cautioned the British Ministry of Defence that it may be providing insufficient privileges for families of servicemen from Nepal.

The verdict allowed both sides to claim victory, but it was clear that the court had rejected the Gurkhas' counsel Cherie Booth's claim that the pension scales were discriminatory. British officials estimated it would have cost £2 billion to compensate the



Gurkhas at the High Court in London last week.

soldiers if the verdict had gone against them. In such a case, they had said, Gurkha recruitment would have been terminated.

The judge urged both sides in the dispute to resolve the issue through negotiation, and refused the Gurkhas permission to appeal. Interestingly, the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) that has been led the legal charge against the British government, welcomed the verdict.

GAESO's attorney, Gopal Siwakoti 'Chintan', told reporters Wednesday: "The court admitted there has been discrimination, we can now flood the British courts with hundreds of cases in future."

Deputy chief of mission at the British

Embassy, David Ward, told us, "The court judgement has clearly identified that very serious allegations of discrimination are clearly not true, and have found that the terms of service which the British government offers to Gurkha soldiers are fair. This provides a sound basis for future planning and operations."

Defence Ministry sources said Britain was keen to continue recruitment of Gurkhas on the basis of the present understanding between the two governments. "We have to be very sensitive on what is laid down on the 1947 tripartite agreement (between Britain, India and Nepal) as it specifically sees return of the Gurkha soldiers to their home country upon the completion of service," a senior defence official told us. "If that arrangement were to change now, our government would look very seriously at whether the present arrangement would continue."

Many ex-Gurkhas are disappointed about the costly legal battle being waged in their name. Pragmatic groups like the Nepal Ex-Servicemen Association say they may gain more lobbying through diplomatic channels. They say continued recruitment of Gurkhas is in Nepal's national interest. ♦

Shivaratri



On Shivaratri this Saturday go over to Kirateshwar beyond Pashupati, and get yourself a copy of the Nepali Shiva-Parvati poster. The celestial duo looks Nepali because Shiva hung out in the Himalaya and Parvati is rightly sung of in Nepal as "Himala ki chhori". So, the poster by artist Subhas Rai depicts a very hill-ethnic Shiva, and sitting by his side on a chaupati pedestal is a Chhetri-looking Parvati (tilahari, chaubandi-cholo, rhododendron in hand). The animals in attendance are the snow-leopard instead of lion and a young yak instead of the buffalo. The backdrop is Pashupatinath and the Gauri Shankar massif, as seen from Dolakha. Happy Shivaratri. To order copies of poster: info@himalassociation.org

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LESSONS FROM LANKA

A month into the ceasefire, Nepalis are now getting used to "normalcy". Making the people regard normalcy as the norm is the best way to guard the peace process from being derailed. To be sure, this is not yet peace. It is just an absence of conflict. This phase is necessary to lay down the pre-condition for the negotiations that lie ahead.

There are lessons for us from the Sri Lankan peace process where a ceasefire has held now for over a year (see: "Prabakaran and Prachanda", #133). If two sides in a 20-year-war with 70,000 deaths marked by indiscriminate attacks on civilians, extreme ethnic polarisation and decades of bad blood can agree on a negotiated solution there is no reason why we can't. It is better to find a solution now than to wait for the war to drag on for another 25 years. If negotiations are the only way, then it is infinitely wiser for Nepal's warring parties to do so now rather than after 100,000 Nepalis are killed.

The Sri Lankan peace process was most fragile during its first two months. But the reason it held was because it fulfilled two main criteria: a) hearts were in the right place in the leadership of both sides, b) and there were good managers guiding and facilitating the peace process.

Of course, the post 9/11 international situation was a factor because it dried up the Tigers' source of diaspora dollars. The one person who deserves most credit for the peace process is Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has been hands-on in making the initial overtures, and steering the process from day-to-day. Wickremesinghe knows that Sri Lanka's war-weary public is a peace constituency far more powerful than the southern chauvinists and political forces who feel left out. On the other side, there are rogue elements among the Tigers, like the eastern commander Karuna, who has been implicated in the arms smuggling incident last month.

If Wickremesinghe hadn't been in politics, he would have been a journalist. He is media savvy and his press management skills have contributed to moderating extreme views. The Norwegian mediators got both sides to agree on media guidelines preventing the parties from playing to the gallery. In Kathmandu, the guidelines are still doing the rounds and despite some belligerent posturing the ceasefire is on track.

In Sri Lanka, as in Nepal, there are cynics and skeptics who voice concerns about a sellout. In January, Wickremesinghe told them, "Those who make their living out of the war, like arms dealers and war correspondents better find other businesses. The economy will improve with peace, and there will be enough opportunities for everyone. No one should try to sabotage peace." That is good advice to the detractors of our own peace process as well.

The Sri Lankan model of using international facilitators has advantages. The main pre-requisite is to have the necessary political will at the highest levels on both sides for a negotiated solution, but once that is achieved the role of a neutral mediator can be helpful. Conflict mediation is a technical skill, you need experts who can find ways around entrenched, intransigent positions. In many cases it is a question of semantics, in others it is a carefully calibrated compromise position acceptable to both sides. This is best done by people who don't have a stake—outsiders who have the experience and the perspective to find the middle path.

In the secret pre-negotiation negotiations going on at present between the government coordinator and the Maoists, it is King Gyanendra who is acting as the final arbiter. But he is an interested party, and the Maoists want the first round of talks with him so they can guarantee themselves a berth in an interim government. This is why it may be wiser in the long run to have mediators who can steer the process: it has worked well so far in Aceh and Sri Lanka.

But, in the end, it is up to us. It is the Nepali people who have to force their leaders to make the ceasefire stick, not be rattled by violations, make the peace process stay on course and never lose sight of the goal: a tolerant and inclusive new Nepal with social justice and economic progress.

The main lesson from Sri Lanka is this: war mongers have no political future when the people overwhelmingly yearn for peace.

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



The tarai cauldron

For long-term peace, we have to move beyond tokenism to real devolution.

To turn the impending peace talks in their favour, the Maoist leadership badly needs some new friends, additional allies and fresh fellow travellers. Comrade Krishna Bahadur Mahara of CNN fame and Comrade Dina Nath Sharma of Artless Drama notoriety are doing the rounds of established power places in the Valley to garner support for Baburam Bhattarai's claim to state power. The revolutionary agenda of forging an inclusive Nepali identity has suddenly receded into the background.

Exclusion of the majority from the political, economic and social mainstream was one of the main reasons our revolutionaries took to the armed path. But the prospect of power sharing seems to have transformed our firebrand comrades into confirmed status quoists. The elite everywhere clones itself with relative ease and survives regime changes to prosper all over again.

The dependable friends of the Maoists are all their old foes: Madhav Kumar Nepal, Kirti Nidhi Bishu and Sher Bahadur Deuba. Perhaps Marich Man Singh and Nava Raj Subedi will also get a visit from Maoist interlocutors one of these days. But Mahanta Thakur, Surendra Chaudhary and Chitra Lekha Yadav must wait. Madhesis haven't figured in the itinerary of the revolutionaries yet.

The Maoists negotiating team does have a Matrika Yadav, but what does Comrade Yadav have for his fellow madhesis? During the Madheshi Awakening Forum's public programs on Saturday and Sunday, the plight of people of tarai origin was raised again and again, but none of the participants expect much from the Maoists.

Even more than frustration, it's hopelessness that breeds extremism. In a society where nearly half the population is nursing grievances against the establishment in silence, this is a potential flashpoint of even more ominous proportions than the Maoist war.

Dissatisfaction is not unique to madhesis alone, dalits and janjatis are also excluded. The relative deprivation of a madheshi dalit compared with that of hill dalit, or that of a Tharu poor compared to a Gurung or Magar poor is glaring. The grievances of the tarai activists aren't just political rhetoric.

By appointing Prashu Narayan Chaudhary as the chairman of the Rajparishad, the king has honoured the indigenous population of the tarai, but a closer look at the list of members nominated to the royal council makes it clear that the madhesis haven't got a fair deal. The king is hardly to blame. It's the social milieu that doesn't allow the establishment to go beyond tokenism. Badri Prasad Mandal is officiating premier, but how many of his cabinet colleagues are madhesis?

Representation of ethnic madhesis in the political parties is no better. Among the 44 members elected to the Central Committee of the UML at its recently held convention at Janakapur, Ram Chandra Jha is the lone madheshi. Comrade Jha scraped through somehow—he is the last in the winners' list based on the tally of votes received—mainly because he was the prime host of the event on his home turf. Results of the Janakapur Convention show that the UML continues to remain in the firm grip of the BCN (Bahun, Chettri, Newar) elite.

The composition of the bureaucracy is even more skewed. Bahuns dominate the

administration, and their preponderance is growing. The Nepal Public Service Commission reports only one madheshi in the list of 77 persons recruited for the post of Section Officers. These are the people who will lead the Nepali administration in the years to come: Bahuns 85 percent, Chhetris 9 percent, Newars 2.6 percent and one each from the hill janjati and madheshi population.

The stranglehold of bahuns on Nepali judiciary is too obvious to ignore. Technically, there is nothing wrong in successive Upadhyayas succeeding each other, but the message that it gives to the excluded isn't that of merit reigning supreme.

Such views are often termed divisive and communal. Jostling for a share of the pie is an inherent part of the modernisation process—faster the pace of change, more the demands for accommodation in the mainstream. During the authoritarian Panchayat regime, emerging elites of marginal population groups were often quite happy with the crumbs of office. But in a democracy, everyone desires a place of honour at the central table. Anything less merely whets the appetite.

Fortunately for the ruling classes (but unfortunately for the ruled), the BCN grip over the national media is even tighter—editors of all major Nepali broadsheet dailies are bahuns. Hence, even an event like the public meeting of Madheshi Awakening Forum failed to make it to the headlines of any major newspaper. But in the long run, turning a deaf ear may set off an explosion that will blow all our eardrums. Injustice doesn't disappear just because the powerful ignore it.

When Colonel (Retd) Narayan Singh Pun sits down with Baburam Bhattarai to finalise the agenda of talks some time next month, here is what they should put at the top of their list—ensuring just representation of madhesis in all walks of life.

If a society is to institutionalise peace, its leaders must move beyond tokenism to real devolution. And if it is not done politically, the Maoists have shown that guns get the attention. Hidden from view, the grievances of the disenfranchised are simmering away underneath. ♦

LETTERS

WHAT TOURISTS?

I heartily congratulate Daniel Lak for his witty but accurate assessment of the present tourist slump in Nepal compared to Thailand ("Welcome to Nepal", #133). Indeed the heart of the problem lies with the obsolete visa regulations here. You all remember that these regulations were enforced in the seventies, in order to get rid of the large hippy population, which had somehow tarnished the country's image. I came to Nepal for the first time two years ago, leading a small group of professionals and developed a very deep attachment to this great country and its warm population.

I came for another visit a few months ago and Nepal grew on me. It was an ideal base for writing, painting and drawing. I was renewing my visa regularly, at \$30 a full page stamp for one month. Maximum stay per calendar year is five months. I have met a number of

foreign volunteers, full of goodwill, who donate happily and discreetly their time and meagre savings to provide educational support in some remote destitute areas, and these wonderful people, mostly students, tell me they have to pay the same exorbitant visa fees!

This is the main deterrent to anyone with the wish and means to stay longer, and to any would-be small to medium investor. In Chiang Mai, north-Thailand, I conducted a research on the community of Western expatriates. All of them lived off their pension—an average \$950 a month, spent locally. They had to renew their visa every 30 days and exceptions are made for those with big investments. The initial visa is free on arrival and can be renewed for as long as you want, free of charge. Many long-term residents have followed this method for years. And in the long run they contribute a significant amount of hard currency to Thailand.

Bernard Lazarevitch, France

SAMRAT

Thank you, Aruna Kandel ("Samrat, Manjushree and English writing in Nepal", #132) for being brave enough to voice your well deserved criticism of the so-called modern English language authors of Nepali origin. Can these people write in English that is simple but eloquent, easy to understand but fascinating and thought provoking at the same time? The answer clearly seems to be a big no. After reading the writings of these authors, one has to wonder—who is their target audience? Certainly not the average English speaking Nepali or for that matter an American or an Englishman. Henry the Eighth would have been perfectly comfortable reading the writing of

so called English speaking Nepali intelligentsia. But the same cannot be said about the majority of the English speakers anywhere in the world. Who are these people trying to impress with the 100 percent grammatically perfect English that is impossible to decipher for even seasoned English speakers? I cannot think of anyone else but themselves.

Sebastian Peters, Seattle

• Reading the vicious attacks by the likes of Aruna Kandel and others in your paper against Samrat and Manjushree, I get the feeling these are people who have some personal grudge against the two Nepali writers in English. Either that or they are consumed by jealousy, and you have given them space to vent it. My only advice to Samrat's detractors would be: please read and re-read *The Guru of Love*. A more compassionate, humane and non-judgemental masterpiece of modern writing is hard to find. And we are proud that such a sad and universal story of human failing, struggle and triumph was told by a Nepali. Bravo, Samrat!

Anil B Gurung, by email

TALKS, AND THEN?

Should we be euphoric about the so-called truce ("Om Shanti", #133)? Will it change the lives of those who struggled in the Panchayat-era, under 12 years of democracy, and the Maoist insurgency? How can a truce called by a system that follows no discernible rules improve our lives? It is difficult to say where real hope lies. Certainly not in a monarchy that squandered 30

years of opportunity to serve these people. Not with the power hungry political parties who still can't get their act together. The present government should be left to what it does best—cutting ribbons at inaugurations. They have yet to put together a negotiation team or an agenda for peace talks with the Maoists. The people should not have to rely on those who extort, terrorise and murder. We cannot have a truce that benefits only Kathmandu and a handful of the elite who have received a lion's share of whatever "development" Nepal has experienced. Who will look after the people who are most in need? It will be business as usual until another insurgency. We mustn't keep going around in circles.

Satish Pandey, Kathmandu

CEASING FIRE

Talk of talks is fine, but more important is bringing about fundamental changes. It is vital that the changes in the constitution are implemented. Why not begin peace talks by putting in place some of the current provisions in the constitution? Let some time and resources be spent on the remote, neglected districts and marginalised groups. Let us share only those dreams which we can make happen. Otherwise we face even greater disasters in the future.

Amir Shrestha, email

MORE BIRDS

I would like to add to the list of birdwatching sites in "Bird country" (# 131). The best spot for watching different species of

waterfowl in the Kathmandu Valley is by a small lake in Taudaha near Chobar. Migratory birds can be seen here between December and March when hundreds of birds make a stop over. The locals have started to conserve the fish and the birds have flocked back.

Dinesh Rai, Naxal

MOHAN KHATRI

The establishment of a US-based charity called "The Mohan Khatri Fund" has recently come to my attention. Its website, which was taken down earlier this week, included the text of an article about the death of my husband, Major (rtd.) Mohan Khatri, which appeared in the Nepali Times (#116). The charity's founders did not ask for my permission to raise money using my late husband's name, and they agreed earlier this week to take his name off of their site. Nonetheless, the use of his name for several months has created the false impression among some that I, or other members of the Khatri family, established the fund to raise money. This is not the case. We are not beneficiaries of the fund, nor did we have a hand in its establishment.

Krishna Khatri, Kathmandu

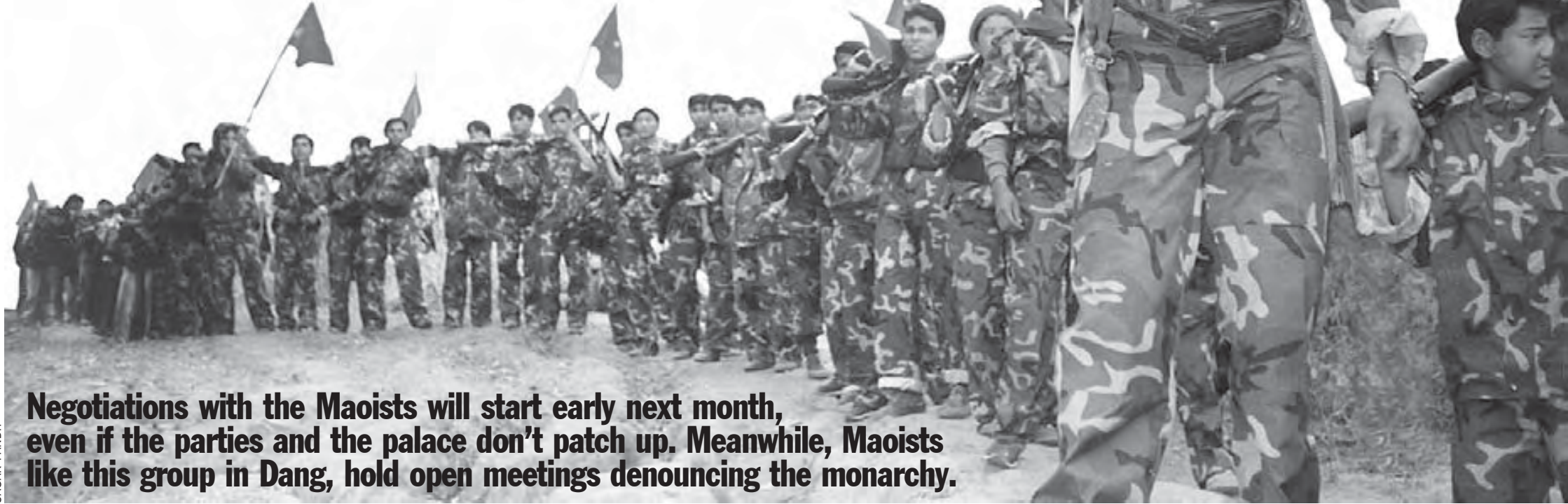
CORRECTION

"Kudos for Chilime" (From the Nepali Press, # 133) was written by Kaushal Bhattarai.



Carlsberg

Peace now, talks later



SAGAR PANDIT

Negotiations with the Maoists will start early next month, even if the parties and the palace don't patch up. Meanwhile, Maoists like this group in Dang, hold open meetings denouncing the monarchy.

BHAGIRATH YOGI

The guns have been silent for one month now. The relief can be seen on the faces of people on the streets, the villagers returning from India to their districts in the western hills and the increase in tourist arrivals at Kathmandu airport.

But for many Nepalis, especially in the districts of Dang, Rolpa, Rukum and Salyan, all this is too good to be true. This is not yet peace, they say, the two sides are just resting and they will start

again like they did in November 2001. The public has a right to be sceptical, especially since they don't see signs of the peace process starting anytime soon and the confidence gap between the government and the Maoists seem to be as wide as ever.

There seems little doubt that the Maoists are more prepared for peace. They announced their negotiation team led by Baburam Bhattarai within a week of the ceasefire announcement, and sent its two-man advance team of Krishna Bahadur Mahara and

Dinanath Sharma to lobby extensively with political leaders, civil society and selected media in the capital. Their main message: we haven't struck any secret deal with the king, we want the political parties involved in the peace process.

For its part, the government is yet to announce a full-fledged negotiation team. Worse, it seems the reason is wrangling in the cabinet over who will get the limelight. The government's chief peace coordinator, Narayan Singh Pun is beaver away behind the

scenes, and has tried to put on a brave face by predicting that the peace talks will start within two weeks after the finishing touches on a code of conduct is agreed upon. In his first press meet in a month, Pun said on Wednesday, "The Peace Bus is leaving, either you get on board or you get left behind."

The all-party meet convened by Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand last week to forge a political consensus for the peace process turned out, as expected, to be a fiasco. All the main parties

stayed away, and even his own RPP boycotted the meeting fuelling rumours that Chand's days in office are numbered.

Meanwhile, political parties are caught between lukewarm public support and the need to show that they are still a force to be reckoned with. Public opinion blames the national leaders of the parties for the failures of the past 12 years, and wants to give the king and his team a chance to restore real peace. By threatening to put a spanner in the peace process, the parties have dug

themselves further into the mire. However, the parties are right about one thing—the king needs their support for the peace talks with the Maoists to take shape and succeed. In this, the parties also have the backing of India and the West.

"We want a parliament, either through elections or through re-instatement," Girja Koirala told a select press meet on Thursday. He also disclosed that he had met Prachanda and Baburam exactly a year ago and got a verbal commitment that the Maoists

NATION

would support the preamble of the constitution. If correct, this was a major breakthrough since it would mark the first time that the Maoists have said OK to constitutional monarchy and parliamentary multiparty democracy. Koirala said he immediately relayed this Maoist concession to King Gyanendra, who instructed him to find out the Maoists' "final bottom line". Koirala said he told the Maoist leaders they would have to make a written commitment, and this came promptly three days later in a statement to "respect the gains of the 1990 peoples' movement". The political parties took this as an oblique acceptance of the constitutional preamble. However, as Koirala recounts, the shaky Deuba government couldn't capitalise on this progress and the war continued for another year.

What is intriguing is why Koirala should make this revelation now. The Nepali Congress leader seems determined that the king cannot ignore a party that got over one-third of the popular votes in the 1999 elections and he wants to put pressure on the king to either reinstate parliament or declare elections.

For the UML, too, the future is uncertain. Squeezed by a resurgent monarchy on one side and the Maoists on the other, the UML has to tread carefully. If the Maoists join the mainstream, the UML would be the biggest loser. Madhav Kumar Nepal flirted

with the idea of accepting the palace's offer to be prime minister, but seems to have decided that it would be politically suicidal to do so in a party that will be radicalised in the next elections.

"We don't mind the Maoists coming out, we encourage them to give up violence and enter peaceful political competition," the UML's Iswor Pokharel told us. "But we don't think this government has the mandate or the capacity to lead a peace process."

"The Maoists seem quite serious about a peaceful resolution this time, while the government looks utterly confused," concludes Bhogendra Sharma, who was one of the rights activists who met the Mahara-Sharma duo on Tuesday. Sources say a high-level team comprising former chief secretary Karna Dhoj Adhikari, former chiefs of the Royal Nepali Army Satchit Shumsher J B Rana and Dharmapal Barsingh Thapa, and former police chief and RPP

leader Dhruba Bahadur Pradhan, have been put into place to devise the government's peace strategy.

Like Pun, the team will also be briefing the king directly and take orders from him if necessary. "As in the 29 January ceasefire, the role of the royal-appointed cabinet and the prime minister would be to legalise the understanding reached between the monarchy and the Maoists," one insider told us. While the palace still has misgivings about the Maoist demand for elections to a constituent assembly (so as to

dilute the powers of the monarchy), Maoists are wary of growing international interest in Nepal's peace process. "They would not want the direct involvement of the United States or Britain in the peace talks but would accept mediation by neutral, international agencies," said a source close to the Maoists.

Bhogendra Sharma of the human rights group CVICT also says that the presence of an international mediator would remove obstacles in negotiations and put into place confidence-building measures. "Rather than taking up the complicated political issues at first, both sides should discuss humanitarian issues in the beginning followed by political and military matters over a period of extended negotiations," Sharma says.

One rights activist who returned to Kathmandu this week after taking part in a Swiss-sponsored conflict resolution seminar in Geneva told us he expects the peace talk to be a complicated and long-drawn out affair. Trust is of paramount importance, and he is worried that the lack of trust between the king and the parties will not help the peace process. For now, the parties and the royal-appointed government are circling each other warily. It would help if they could resolve their difference before the peace process starts. But, as Naryan Singh Pun says, he is not going to wait for that to begin negotiations. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

British Special Rep

Nepal seems to have been finally recognised as a hot spot by Britain. The British government has appointed a "special representative" for Nepal, a distinction that has gone to other places like Cyprus, Georgia and the Middle East. The special rep, Sir Jeffrey James (*right*), will coordinate efforts in support of the recent ceasefire and the emerging peace process. Sir Jeffrey is a career diplomat who has served as the British high commissioner (ambassador) in Nairobi. "It is part of the pattern of commitment of the UK government in preventing conflict and resolving them through peaceful means," David Ward, deputy chief of mission at the British Embassy told us. "The appointment here is demonstration of the British government's commitment for restoration of peace and development in Nepal," he added. Though he will be based in London, Sir Jeffrey is expected to visit Nepal and the region in mid-March.



Helping Nepal

Some of Nepal's top pop artists donated half the proceeds, nearly \$1,800, from a Nepali music concert in London on 23 February for HELP NEPAL Network, a charity started by Nepalis living abroad. Babin Pradhan, Yem Baral, Nhyoo Bajracharya and Ruju Tuladhar entertained a 500-strong Nepali crowd at Woolwich Public Hall in East London. Sapan Kumar Rai and Situ Kharel, Nepali singers who are based in London, also performed. The manager of the event, Raju Tuladhar, said the Nepali community in the UK was very supportive.

Chaired by BBC journalist, Rabindra Mishra, HELP NEPAL Network encourages Nepalis around the world to give back to their country. It operates in 10 countries and has donated over £22,000 towards building schools and libraries in remote districts like Dolpa, Dang, Pyuthan and Parbat. It has also organised several health camps in Chitwan and Kathmandu. (www.helpnepal.net)

Music peace yatra

A travelling music concert is spreading the word of peace as it tours the length and breadth of Nepal. *Sunder Shanta Nepal, Shanti Sangeet Yatra 2059* has already performed in Dharan and Hetauda where more than 35,000 people attended the events. Organised by Himal Association and managed by event nepa-laya, the tour began from Dharan on 22 February and will conclude at Kathmandu on 8 March. Tickets are priced at a nominal Rs 10 per person and locals flocked to watch the performances of popular Nepali singers like Deep Shrestha, Kunti Moktan, Ram Thapa, Prem Rana 'Avatari', Sapana Shree, Sukmit Gurung and Nepathya.



Hearts, minds and vitamins

In an attempt to win hearts and minds during the "peace period", the Royal Nepal Army has launched free medical camps in mid-western Nepal—the area most affected by the insurgency. It will provide free treatment to people including those injured during security clashes. Army spokesman Col Dipak Gurung, said they will aid the reconstruction of public property like schools and health facilities. Gurung also said the nearly month-long ceasefire has been peaceful except for minor incidents. He said the security force would return to their barracks only if they received orders from the government. The Maoists have demanded demobilisation and a repeal of the anti-terrorist law before starting peace talks.

The Nepal Digest

The Nepal Digest (TND), the first Nepali on-line bulletin board started ten years ago, has returned to cater to the ever-increasing audience interested on Nepal and Nepali affairs. "Its readers consider the rejuvenated TND a forum for intellectuals to express, share and discuss ideas. The Nepal Digest is, in fact, becoming a platform to share our hopes, concerns and aspirations," said Ujjwal Bhattarai, editor of TND. (www.thenepaldigest.org)

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



The real battle

We are on the brink of war in Iraq. It was always going to be this way. President George W Bush probably knew on the 12 September 2001 that his country's forces would be attacking Baghdad at some point in the next few years. Just as it was decided within hours of the horrendous events of the day before that Afghanistan's Taleban regime, one of the world's poorest and least capable of defending itself, would soon face the awesome might of the US military.

Afghanistan was an obvious soft target to temper the wrath of a profoundly shocked and fearful American people. The use of Afghan soil to train many of those whose hate fuelled the World Trade centre attacks was a prima facie reason to force regime change in Kabul. It was done, although only in the broadest, most brutal sense. What's fallen between the cracks are the subtleties of manipulating post-Taleban Afghan politics to rule out more 9/11's. Gunboat diplomacy by great imperial powers rarely produces lasting, satisfactory results. Hamid Karzai reigns but does not rule in his own country: the parched hills and defiles of the borderlands, so well known to Karzai from his years as a fighter against Soviet imperialism, are still a breeding ground for venom and fury that will soon be directed outward.

Which brings us to Iraq. Saddam Hussein played his cards well from his own twisted point of view. And at the table with him were far wealthier, far more powerful players. George Bush Sr and Margaret Thatcher, the architects of the first Western war against him, both fell to the forces of democracy, which failed to unseat Saddam. He outlasted John Major and Bill Clinton too. When the latest Bush slipped mysteriously into office in the United States, Saddam joked that "he'd seen off the father, now he would survive the son too." Britain's Tony Blair—a more legitimate elected leader than George W Bush—won two elections while the bloodstained



A GBU-15 'smart' bomb

dictator of Baghdad mocked American and British might by remaining in power, despite countless sorties and bombing raids against Iraqi targets in the southern and northern "no fly zones". No one seemed to care in the US or the UK.

But on 12 September 2001, Iraq appeared on a list of targets that America just had to hit. Never mind that the situation had festered for years, that George Bush Sr and John Major had lost their nerve in 1991, the last best chance for getting rid of the Butcher of Baghdad. Now, a full decade later, it was time. It is time for war. For days and weeks of high-tech videogame displays of smart munitions crashing home in fuzzy black and white screen television pictures, "bombs-eye-view" graphic displays, gruff manly press briefings by ministers, secretaries and generals. One-sided,

Imperial power is squaring off against liberal conscience.

jargon-laden analysis by retired officials with similar pedigrees. Troubled reportage by a few brave souls, but most American journalists getting metaphorically into uniform and cheering on the sidelines. It is time for death on both side, brave soldiers and civilians, cowards and heroes, rich and poor, privileged and backward.

Public opinion is uncertain at best, uneasy with the political preparations or unaware of the medium and long-term implications. And that's just America. In Britain, France, Germany, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Italy, Spain and just about every Asian, African and Latin American country, the majority don't want war. With their massive protests of recent days, they've proved that. But leaders of those countries are privy to more complex information. They know that America's wrath will fall on those who don't help in Iraq. So they support the White House and pray for violence to end quickly. It might. But what comes next is most interesting. And how America continues to behave as the real battle rages.

That battle is not for Iraq, Afghanistan or even to wipe out the evil men of al-Qaeda. That's for the heart and soul of the US and its standing in the world. Imperial power is squaring off against liberal conscience, boardroom heroes basking in the glory of a brave military are taking on those who truly believe in the values of the American republic, and interpret them as fairness, decency, justice and generosity.

Watch that battle closely. It's the one that matters most. ♦

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A brave sun

Regardless of how Surya Bahadur Thapa's effort to provide an enduring liberal democratic character to the RPP plays out, you can't ignore his robust record.

Just when you were beginning to believe the liberal face of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party was fading into the annals of the Pokhara convention, Surya Bahadur Thapa steps in to assert how the country is on the cusp of fundamental change. It's unclear who his anti-regression oratory last week was actually intended for. For the moment, the clear beneficiary is Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand. It must be difficult to keep the faithful calm when Parasu Narayan Chaudhari has joined Mohammed Mohasin to complete the RPP troika in vital constitutional posts.

Thapa's insistence that the Chand government isn't the RPP's must be seen in its constructive spirit. Once party activists shed the illusion, the cabinet could start conforming to its individual character. In case you're wondering how such long-time adversaries could so easily bury the hatchet, they haven't. The new RPP president, Pashupati Sumshere JB Rana, boycotted Chand's all-party meeting following consultations with his predecessor. (Those who got a crash course in 18th and 19th century political intrigues during the fiery Thapa-Rana exchanges in the Rastriya Panchayat two decades

ago must be particularly anxious to see the two men help the country avoid another accident.)

Regardless of how Thapa's effort to provide an enduring liberal democratic character to the RPP plays out, you can't ignore his words. He's always been close to the centre of action. His first stint at the helm covered the latter half of BP Koirala's eight-year incarceration at Sundarjal. Thapa resigned five months after BP was freed. Some still believe he was forced to pay the price for failing to deliver on his pledge to get BP firmly within the panchayat fold. BP's writings, however, contain a different interpretation of Thapa.

Out of power, Thapa sought to bolster his liberal credentials by focusing on the threat posed by the "dyarchy" of Narayanhity and Singha Durbar that had set in. He landed behind bars in August 1972 and went on a hunger strike to back his calls for political reforms. When nothing happened, many Nepalis began wondering how history would remember him. The only pancha ex-premier to have been jailed by his own flock, perhaps. (Tulsi Giri, too, was imprisoned by the panchas, but that was way before he held the formal designation of

prime minister.) Thapa's re-emergence four years later raised hopes of another push for liberalisation. After BP's return from exile in 1976, however, Thapa's line was that the Kangresis were being treated too leniently. BP and Ganesh Man Singh spent time analysing what Thapa's transformation could mean. In his second set of prison diaries, BP preferred to stick to his views of the 60s: "The one element which is apprehensive of an agreement between us and the king is India. So my feeling is that it is a manoeuvre of India through Thapa." ("Back at Sundarjal >26", #129).

The student unrest of 1979 brought Thapa a moment of personal glory. He got the premiership from Kirti Nidhi Bista, whose sustained pressure had driven him out of office a decade earlier. After the panchas won the referendum and the Kangresis boycotted the subsequent elections, Thapa's detractors held him guilty of repeating the same mistake: failure to bring BP into the partyless fold. Over the next two years, Thapa's move to liberalise the panchayat edifice from within put him at odds with the partyless

hawks. Nepalis got their first taste of a no-confidence motion, as Thapa insisted that the palace uphold the letter and spirit of the third amendment to panchayat constitution. Out of office, he established himself as the permanent leader of the opposition through his crusade against the "bhumigat giroha".

In December 1989, several weeks before the people's movement began, Thapa counselled the palace to read the writing on the debris of the Berlin Wall. His ascension to the premiership seven years later was another crowning accomplishment. When Thapa issued his nation-is-in-crisis alert two years ago, he couldn't have had a premonition of the national convulsion the Narayanhity carnage would create. His proposal for a broad-based alliance between the palace and parliamentary parties looked good enough for Koirala to plagiarise.

What underpins Thapa's early-detection expertise? The external quarters BP regularly alluded to? Pure political analysis? Or periodic visions from the Almighty? Does it really matter when his record is so robust? ♦



Just another Shangri-la?

⇒ from p1

In November, the US Embassy gathered all nationals here for a security briefing. It stressed the random, indiscriminate and unpredictable nature of Maoist violence could increase the likelihood of Americans in Nepal being caught in the crossfire. That spooked a lot of expats, but with fears of terrorism back home in America they shrugged their shoulders and decided to stay, taking comfort in the fact that no foreigners had actually been harmed in Nepal.

As one US citizen working in Kathmandu points out, a distinction has to be drawn between people who work here and people who actually invest here. "I wouldn't consider leaving unless two things happened. One, if Maoist ideology was specifically targeted against Americans, and if, after espousing such an ideology or policy, that such incidents should occur," he says. "It's far more dangerous to be a Nepali in Nepal than a foreigner. Look how many Nepali people have been killed. There is plenty of danger. Westerners could get hurt, but it is not commensurate with what the average Nepali faces."

Still other expatriates like Sinagaporean restaurateur Erick Tan moved to Kathmandu in 2000 despite warnings from friends about political unrest. Tan runs Singma restaurant in Jhamsikhel with two other Singaporeans and a Malaysian partner. He calls himself an optimist, one who sees "possibilities instead of problems". Tan is happy about the ceasefire and hopes the peace talks will be successful.

"It is really good news for the whole country, and for us too," he said. "People have not been so willing to eat out at night, maybe that's going to change." Tan has no regrets about moving into Nepal, and says the pace of life here gives him quality time with his wife and three children. His only complaint is about visas. "We're here to do business yet the government hassles us for visas which

are expensive and difficult to obtain."

Nepal's unfriendly visa policy and growing fears of violence have already convinced many to move on. A Danish expatriate who has lived in Nepal for the past few years says, "Nepal is a wonderful place, but it is impossible to stay any longer." He is looking to India where tax laws, visa regulations and land ownership laws encourage foreign investment and enterprise. He says he had to spend an extra \$200 to renew his business visa because of delays at the immigration office.

Clark Warren and the Naropa Institute recently shifted operations to Sikkim after 17 years in Nepal. It wasn't easy to uproot and move, but the safety of his students became paramount after an emergency evacuation of two students from Phaplu when the truce between the government and the Maoists collapsed in late 2001. Sikkim was Warren's fallback option.

"Most students were not willing to come to Nepal given the tense and unpredictable situation. Gangtok is smaller, cleaner, safer, and in a more natural setting than Kathmandu," says Warren, who is sceptical that the Maoists will ever change their spots. But he says he hasn't completely given up on Nepal.

Another expat who hasn't is New Zealander, Peter Stewart. The director of Himalayan Mountain Bikes who put Nepal on the map for adventure bike rallies says business fell by 90 percent, and it didn't look like things would pick up much. So he is looking beyond the Himalaya to ensure the business stays afloat. "Luckily we've been invited by the Sri Lanka Tourism Board to open a branch there," says Stewart who spent the last few months setting up shop on the recently-peaceful island nation. "Sri Lanka is a perfect example where peace has been made and the country is starting to prosper." ♦



Erick Tan

Martinair in Nepal

The Dutch charter airline, Martinair, will begin weekly flights between Amsterdam and Kathmandu, replacing the link that is being vacated by Transavia airlines from April. Martinair is a bigger airline with widebody Boeing 767s in its fleet. Nepali Consul General in Amsterdam, Cas de Stoppelaar, said the service would be an important link not only for the Dutch market, but also for the rest of northwest Europe. Yogendra Shakya at the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says he is encouraged that the entry of Martinair into Nepal would bring in business for the ailing tourism industry. The weekly flights are scheduled to begin from 8 October 2003.

Pepsi turns blue

Variun Beverages Nepal has launched Pepsi Blue to the Nepali public. A fusion of berries with a splash of cola in a vibrant shade of blue, the launch coincided with Cricket World Cup 2003. The product will be available in 200ml and 300ml bottles, and is priced at Rs 9 and Rs 12 each.

Working on lunch

China Garden at Hotel Solite Crown Plaza, has introduced the "working lunch for busy executives". The concept targets simplicity, value for money and promptness. The three-course menu is light on the stomach and on the wallet, the hotel says. The scheme will rotate among other restaurants in the hotel, including The China Garden which has been selected among the Best Restaurants in Asia from establishments surveyed in 80 cities in 23 countries.

Affordable homes

Buoyed by the immense popularity of the Sunrise Homes, the MS Group has introduced Single Floor Flats targeting the Valley's middle class population. Promoters say the family flats have been constructed keeping convenience and safety in mind. They will have reliable access to basic amenities like water, electricity, cable channel and solar heaters. "This project will realise the dream of a beautiful house for every person," said promoter Sumit Kumar Agrawal.



Sales up

AVCO International, the sole distributor of Hyundai Vehicles in the kingdom, held a meeting for all dealers at the Jomsom Mountain Resort between 8-12 February. The event came after a grueling 6-month period during which 300 Hyundai vehicles were sold. Six major dealers from all over the country participated in the conference and devised plans to further improve their performance in the second half of the fiscal year.



The numbers game

We have a flippant tendency to fling numbers out of thin air.

"Today, Nepali music is a Rs 150 million industry..." this newspaper reported in its story on how Nepali music has come of age ("This year's hits", #131). How did this newspaper so confidently come up with that figure? What is its source? Intrigued, I called up Music Nepal, and its marketing manager admitted that his firm has no reliable figures for the whole industry. Additional calls to the owners of well-known music production houses and music-stores in town yielded no corroborating information. When asked who would be likely to know the information, almost all told me to ask Music Nepal.

In light of this, what is one to make of statements such as "Nepali music is a Rs 150 million industry"? Is it low? Is it high? Or is it as good as anybody's guess? Whatever it is, one thing is clear: from now on, this printed number, whose origin is dubious in the first place, is likely to become some sort of a benchmark for any future data related to Nepali music. Next year, add the obligatory 10 percent growth and, presto, the music industry will be worth about Rs 165 million! And so it goes, the game of transforming speculative guesses into sober-sounding facts.

I use this example not to take this newspaper to task (though, in fairness to its readers, the paper should lay out the sources of the numbers it cites), but to point out that whenever there is a need for numbers related to the Nepali business sector, there seems to be this flippant tendency to fling numbers apparently out of thin air. In this case, it's one thing to say, for instance, that

the Nepali music industry, though bursting with talent, is a fragmented one, and that its market estimates, depending on who you ask, are various. It's another to rush to attach numbers when guesses and unknowns loom large.

Even when numbers are available, they do not add up to new insight. Example: Nepal Tourism Board's (NTB) annual "up-and-down" data that track visitor arrivals by air. Even when you know that the total number of visitors stood at 215,922 in 2002,



you still don't know what it means in terms of the absorbent capacity of Nepal's tourism industry. How high or low is that number, when pressed against—not last year's data, as NTB is fond of doing—a benchmark that measures the full capacity of the industry in any month? Hotels at least talk about occupancy rates to show the use or under use of rooms at their disposal. NTB's data only gives numbers without giving us any indication as to how those numbers reflect Nepal's use or under-use of available tourism capacity—an idea that should drive any tourism-related debate in the country.

The only reliable figures in Nepali business come from those institutions

that require, by law, firms to submit data before they clear up regulatory hurdles to proceed with their businesses. One knows, for instance, that Nepal exported 16,93,196 sq m of carpet worth more than \$80 million to various countries in 2001-2002. This information is available because the sector that exports carpet is relatively much more organised, and its members go through the Carpet and Wool Development Board, which collects the information, to obtain necessary permissions.

Why should we care whether numbers are truthful or not? To be sure, numbers by themselves do not mean much. But in these days when talks of knowledge economy, unregulated markets and competitive firms reign supreme, numbers, as bandied about by everyone, have all the more power to represent or misrepresent Nepali business scenarios. As such, in Nepal, for any business-related discussion and debate, we the consumers of numbers, would do ourselves a service when we start by not taking numbers at face value but by asking where the numbers come from and what they mean and represent. And that brings us back to asking this question again: just how big is the Nepali music industry in terms of the revenue it generates? Any takers? ♦

(Ashutosh Tiwari begins this fortnightly column, which will alternate with Artha Beed's "Economic Sense" in this space. Tiwari can be reached at ashutosh_tiwari@yahoo.com)

IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHILDREN

An open appeal for Children's Rights

We, the undersigned, welcome the recently announced ceasefire and its attendant measures: the people and leaders of Nepal are to be commended for taking the first steps on the road to peace, reconciliation and renewal.

At this critical time, we therefore call, on all duty bearers to remember their duty to one group that has, so far, had no voice: children.

We note that the conflict in Nepal has had, as elsewhere in the world, a profound impact on children direct and indirect, such as:

- The loss of education through disruption and destruction
- The trauma from witnessing acts of violence
- The pain of losing family and friends
- The wrenching effects of dislocation and separation from families
- The ever-present unease and fear that eats away at hope
- Injury and death

We strongly support the recent calls by civil society leaders as well as others including children in Nepal, for schools and children to become zones of peace.

- No political activities in school
- No disruption and closure of schools
- No harassment of teachers
- No intimidation of students
- No recruitment of children in armed formations in support or any other roles
- No bearing of weapons in/near schools

We emphasize, that such an initiative, to be effective, must be under-girded by commonly accepted codes of conduct, such as:

We urge that children issues and rights be central to the peace process - not subsidiary.

We the undersigned, representing national & international NGOs as well as special agencies of the UN, also pledge to play our parts to support the national vision for peace, reconciliation and renewal.

Artisan Aid Nepal	CARE	Children's No Federation	Community Radio Madanpohara Palpa	DCRDC, Balingang	Educate the Children	Equity Development Centre, Dadi	Group for Trans-cultural Relationship (GTR)	Helvetas
IBRON	IDE	Kast Rai Yakkhulu, Kathmandu	Karn Yakkhulu, Chumbung, Kathmandu	Lutheran World Federation	MS Nepal	NEFEJ	Nepal Press Institute	NEPAN
Peace South Asia	PLAN	Planete Enfants	Radio Lumbini	Rural Women Development Centre, Dipayal	Sanchar Bikas Samuha, Dadi	SAP Nepal	Save the Children Japan	Save the Children Norway
Save the Children US	Save the Children UK	Save the Children India	SNV Nepal	UNDP	UNICEF United Mission	to Nepal	Water Aid World	Education World
								Neighbors WWF

IT'S STILL A ZOO OUT THERE!

SRADDHA BASNYAT

From the air, you can see why the Jawalakhel Zoo is an oasis, a verdant square in the midst of Patan's urban sprawl. On the ground, the stately trees and the placid lake make this an ideal place to soothe one's soul. And of course, the wildlife comes for the price of a ticket.

In a country where most public-sector undertakings are crumbling or have gone bankrupt, the Central Zoo is also a management oasis. The zoo now earns Rs 20 million from ticket sales, corporate donations and telending out of animals and is ploughing the money into development and conservation work. Since the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMNTC) took on a 30-year management contract to run the zoo two years ago, our only zoological park is thriving.

"Luckily, the results of our management and good PR have been successful," zoo director RK Shrestha boasts. KMNTC recently secured the first donation made to the zoo by a multinational company: Toyota and the Vaidya Group gave a grant of Rs 4 million. Shrestha hopes this will open the door to future monetary assistance from other corporations, and says he finally has enough funds to begin work on redesigning parts of the



Visit the new, improved Central Zoo in Jawalakhel and help save Nepal's wildlife.

zoo with an emphasis on animal welfare and visitor facilities.

"We can't expand, so the next best thing we can do is to make the animals comfortable in the enclosures we already have," says Shrestha. The enclosures will be renovated, increasing the height and providing more facilities, particularly for the lion and the Malaysian siamang. Their living spaces will be enriched with more water bodies or fountains and rocks.

The Central Zoo houses 18 of 38 endangered species in Nepal, as well as several tropical animals.

A pair of baby hippopotami arrived from Thailand last March in exchange for Danfes, Nepal's national bird. The hippos are a serious commitment. As adults, they consume 30 kgs of bananas and 120 kgs of grass every day. They like long walks that average 4km—something that can get rather monotonous after a once-around-the-cage—and can live for 45 years. "This was the first Kathmandu winter the hippos experienced," says Shrestha, "and we were very apprehensive."

Their 5,000 sq ft habitat at the zoo includes a heated pool

maintained at a constant 10 degrees Celsius.

The zoo has been getting so many leopards captured by villagers on the outskirts of the Valley, that it has now started translocating them to Chitwan. The latest leopard is from Taplejung. Historically, the zoo's track record with leopards has been sketchy. They were fed buffalo meat, but leopard prey consists of smaller animals so the management switched to chicken. The keepers hope periodic inspections, medication against fleas, a controlled diet and a



Clockwise from far left - A hungry Greater One-Horned Rhino reaches for nibblets, the majestic Royal Bengal Tiger, A Malaysian Siamang makes friends and the Blacknecked Stork takes a refreshing dip.

better living environment will make the latest addition to the family more comfortable.

The zoo gets one million visitors annually, and Saturday is the busiest day with an average of 5,000 people. But on the annual Bhoto Jatra, more than 30,000 people visit the zoo after the ceremony. The zoo attracts more visitors with new animals and displays, the latest of which is an aquarium. The grounds have picnic spots, boat rides, a playground, a restaurant and a souvenir shop. Visitors will be relieved to know the restrooms

have finally been modernised thanks to a \$3,320 donation from the King Mahendra Trust Canada Chapter. Of the three facilities within the zoo boundaries, the one located closest to the zoo gates will be completely renovated this year. Improvements will include cross ventilation, better lighting, an automatic water system and improved sanitation. The zoo has been promised a similar amount each year until the remaining two public toilets are complete.

The Central Zoo education



program has become an example for the region. Since 1997 "Friends of the Zoo" (FoZ) has been coordinating with schools on conservation and related issues. Designed for the young, through the zoo's network with 70 schools, FoZ has more than 8,000 members. Along with the fairly academic essay, quiz and drawing competitions, they also conduct night tours, feed animals, visit national parks, attend

workshops in bird watching, bee keeping, aquarium management and vermin composting. FoZ members also receive discounts at various shops and have free entry to the zoo.

Running a zoo is no easy task, and the management is eager to do all it can to make the zoo a centre for education, research and relaxation. ♦

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ESPOUDESINTES

STC

Freedom from want

ROME - Development experts from around the world have stressed the crucial significance of rural and agricultural development as a strategy to enable some 900 million rural poor liberate themselves from the yoke of poverty at the 25th anniversary of the founding of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Government officials from 160 countries and specialists from United Nations agencies agreed that women and indigenous peoples play a crucial role in rural and agricultural development.

The share of official development assistance (ODA) devoted to agriculture and the rural sector has fallen sharply in recent years by almost 50 percent between 1988 and 1999. Today only 12 percent of ODA goes to agriculture compared to 20 percent in the late 1980s. Redressing this imbalance is essential to meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

According to IFAD, 70 percent of the 900 million rural poor worldwide are women and the majority of indigenous peoples are poor. The core of the strategy to assist sustainable development of the indigenous peoples is: formal recognition of human rights and their rights to ancestral lands, water, forests, minerals and other natural resources. It also includes preservation of indigenous cultures and recognition of the environmental services they provide. (IPS)

Donor bashing

WASHINGTON - Reacting to criticism from Western countries that blame development agencies for the ineffectiveness of international aid, the World Bank on Thursday pinned the shortcomings on interminable red tape and lack of cooperation between donor nations.

Under the administration of US President George W Bush, Washington appears to be trying to reduce aid from the World Bank's cheaper lending facilities, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and International Development Association (IDA), on the basis that their assistance is not improving the lives of millions of poor people around the globe. Other bilateral donors have been cutting back their aid budgets and rethinking the importance and worth of foreign assistance altogether.

In response to this trend, the World Bank, which works in more than 100 countries and financed projects worth more than \$19.5 billion in 2002 alone, argues that donors must improve coordination among themselves and sharply cut the innumerable documents and processes that they demand from recipient countries. The bank spoke of "harsh experience on the ground" with, too often, the impact of aid being watered down because it is delivered by "multiple, high-cost aid boutiques". (IPS)



COMMENT

Globalisation has assumed a new form: global mass politics.

Of course, political protests have been global for decades, as past marches against the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, and globalisation itself demonstrated. The revolutions of 1989 and 1991 in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union blanketed a huge region within months. But the anti-Iraq War protests reveal a new dynamic. Up to 10 million protestors in some 60 countries and 600 cities took to the streets on schedule on a single day, 15 February, showing that mass politics can now be approached globally.

Communications and mass media have long enabled "copycat" effects—protests in one place ignite similar actions elsewhere. The overthrow of King Louis Philippe in France in 1848 was carried by the recently introduced telegraph to Germany, igniting revolution. Television images of the fall of the Berlin Wall spurred revolutionary changes throughout the former Soviet bloc. On other occasions, protests such as May Day marches were transformed into widespread social mobilisation, as happened in France on 1 May 1968.

What is distinctive about the recent mass protests against US plans for a war against Iraq is that

February's peace marches showed mass politics

the 15 February event was planned ahead of time, at short notice, for a specific date, and with an explicit goal of worldwide scale. The decision to launch 15 February as a day of mass protest was apparently taken at a meeting of activists at the European Social Forum in Florence in November last year. In ninety days, these organisers turned out more than 5 million protestors worldwide.

There are three keys to this phenomenon:

- The Internet allowed for a rapid worldwide dissemination of organisational plans at an extraordinarily low cost to the organisers.
- Mass action depended on local organisations seizing the initiative, based on a loose global plan. This is what network theorists call "self-organising" behaviour. As each unit took its own steps, these local actions were communicated to the rest of the world through Web sites that tracked and disseminated global plans, as well as offering information, advice, and encouragement.
- A worldwide common concern: the prospect of an Iraq War.

There was a fourth specific feature fuelling the global



Peace activism goes global

by JEFFREY D SACHS



protests too—the exceptionally high level of arrogance and ineptitude displayed by the Bush Administration. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld provoked the world's ire through a mocking disdain for global public opinion. Rumsfeld's juvenile attack on "old Europe" no doubt helped bring millions into the streets.

Indeed, it's no longer possible in an age of mass communication to "play to the home audience" without the world also listening. Bush's swaggering style plays well in Texas, but not in Paris and Berlin.

It is unlikely that worldwide protests will stop the Bush Administration's war plans, but they will help shape the political, security and economic ramifications of such a war. The war is likely to proceed because the US can carry out the military phase of the war largely on its own, and because the Bush Administration has no easy way to back down from its military mobilisation.

Moreover, the uncertainties over war are hurting America's economy (and economies elsewhere), by causing a postponement of business plans and falling consumer confidence. If today's stalemate drags on, the weak economy will threaten Bush's re-election bid in

November 2004. His political advisors may well advise him that it will soon be "now or never" to launch the war.

But America will pay dearly for launching a war against global public opinion. Unless the Bush administration is vindicated in its actions—for example, if Saddam Hussein launches weapons of mass destruction that unite the world against him, or if the US discovers hidden nuclear weapons in the Iraqi desert—anti-American sentiments, and terrorism, unleashed by war, are likely to be massive.

America's people have never been told about the huge financial and political burdens that lie ahead, and they are not ready to bear them. Already the US is facing huge fiscal deficits and a squeeze on popular programs, even before the costs of war and its aftermath are taken into account.

Cheap and instantaneous means of global communication are here to stay. The mass protests of 15 February demonstrates that people throughout the world will use them to demand their right to help shape global political decisions. (© Project Syndicate)

(Jeffrey D Sachs is professor of economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.)

by KEVIN CLEAVER

Southern links



Developing countries need financial and technological cooperation to form an independent foreign policy.

KALINGA SENEVIRATNE in KUALA LUMPUR

While officials of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member countries debated a statement on Iraq, many governments are forging ahead to pursue closer South-South cooperation, which they say is key to strengthening the voice of the 40-year-old movement in world affairs. Many NAM member countries see cooperation in the fields of finance and technology as essential to help developing countries have an independent foreign policy, especially when they are dealing with issues like stopping the threatened US-led war against Iraq.

"NAM is the biggest organisation after the United Nations and it is very important for us to revive it," said Mohamad Osman Omar, Somali's ambassador to India, as a series of ministerial meetings ahead of the NAM leaders' summit. He said that if NAM countries can develop their own banking systems and a common currency or currency exchanges, member nations could get financial aid from each other—and this would go a long way in making NAM members less dependent on rich countries. Omar argued that if NAM countries support each other, they would not have to seek the help of the developed and powerful nations that say "we give you grains, you give us your vote".

NAM's core principles include opposition to "all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics". Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar (pic at left) said that the challenge facing NAM is to put its house in order to "avoid interference from the rich and the powerful countries who do so in pursuit of their own agendas". "NAM has to take up issues important to poorer countries and have common ground on these, so that they can defend their interests" said Addis Alem Balema, a member of Ethiopia's delegation. "NAM has to create more links, otherwise we will be forced into the dictates of developed countries".

He argued that even if NAM comes up with a good statement against war in Iraq, the United States and its allies would ignore it because NAM countries are financially too dependent on them. Still, the head of Jordan's delegation to the NAM senior officials' meeting, Musa Braizat, believes that the movement is developing a strong sense of solidarity and consensus among its members on these issues of debt, impact of globalisation and financial flows.

"Globalisation provides opportunities for NAM (countries), but the challenge is to develop a strategy so that (member countries) will benefit

from it and will be able to deal with negative consequences (on its own)" he added.

This is exactly what the Jakarta-based Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation (CSSTC) is doing, according to its director of programs, Achmad Rofie. The centre has pinpointed the development of small and medium sized enterprises as a critical area of development. It has been conducting training on micro-financing for small and medium enterprises in different parts of the world. Bangladesh's Grameen Bank has been a major player in this training.

Sudhir Devare, vice chairman of the Delhi-based Information Systems for the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries, agreed that it is important to develop the skills of WTO negotiators of NAM countries. "NAM is a good forum to call for collective action in the part of developing countries at WTO," said Devare, who is part of the Indian delegation. He added that his centre works closely with the CSSTC is this endeavour.

"We haven't had the success we hoped for in South-South cooperation (in the last two decades)," he observed. "In the revitalisation of NAM, developing countries must find common ground in moving in areas like reforms to the international financial architecture and the process of globalisation and movement of world trade". (IPS)

ANALYSIS

Eradicate

WASHINGTON - Three of every four poor people in the world live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods. In most low-income countries, agriculture, including crops, livestock, fisheries, and forestry, is the single most important economic sector, accounting for one-quarter to one-half of GDP and the bulk of export earnings.

Food demand is expected to double in poor countries over the next 30-40 years, yet funding for agriculture and rural development have been on the decline, dropping precipitously in the 80s and 90s as a result of the mixed results of past efforts, particularly but not exclusively in Africa. We need to reverse this tendency if we are to achieve the goal of halving the number of poor people by 2015 that the UN has set.

Agricultural subsidies in rich countries contribute to keeping developing country farm products out and world agricultural prices artificially low. This makes little economic sense since many poor countries have a competitive edge because of cheap land and cheap labour, and increased agricultural exports would enable them to buy more from the rich countries. The result is a vicious cycle in which poor countries' inability to penetrate most of the European, Japanese and American agricultural markets discourages investment in their agriculture sectors.

But the elimination of agricultural subsidies in rich countries will not be enough to solve this problem. Other elements are also needed. Good governance and government commitment to rural development—for example, allocating public resources to rural areas for roads, electrification, water and irrigation, agricultural research, and technical assistance to farmers—are indispensable to breaking the nexus of poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation in poor countries.

Successful agriculture and rural development have come to parts of East Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, increasingly China and Vietnam), Central Europe, and several countries of Latin America (Chile was the first success, but more recently Brazil and Mexico have had some as well). India, Ghana and Mozambique have also made progress of late.

Agriculture has been assisted by governments in all countries where it has flourished. Public sector programs have been needed to get agriculture moving. The most successful developing-country agricultural sectors, such as those of Chile and Taiwan, have gone even farther to create a good

poverty, but how?

Ending agriculture subsidies will not help the world's poor.



investment climate for private investment in rural business.

Farmers are private business people whether they are family farmers or corporate farmers. Private investment will not occur in an activity that is excessively taxed or located in an area with no roads, water or electricity. China has created a relatively good rural investment climate, as have South Korea, Chile and Thailand.

In much of Africa, parts of Central America and Central Asia, the basic pre-requisite for a successful rural sector—reasonably stable government—is lacking. Civil strife and war do not allow implementation of the basic platform for long-term rural development. It should be no surprise that a large concentration of the world's desperately poor and hungry is found in countries like the Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Liberia, Afghanistan and Haiti, where civil strife has been nearly continuous for years and years. In

these areas, what is needed first is peace and stability.

In Southern Africa drought is leading tragically to starvation. Emergency assistance, including food aid, is needed. But there are ways of reducing the impact of drought. One way practised in the western US, as well as in much of East Asia and South Asia, is irrigation, which now supports about 40 percent of the world's food supply. More investment in hydraulic infrastructure is needed for irrigation as well as for supplying drinking water and industrial water.

Countries with failing agricultural sectors have low quality agricultural research and extension and a clear urban bias in road construction, water supply, electrification, education and health. The road network in rural Africa is sparse. Potable water available to rural populations is a fraction of that available in urban areas. Schools and health facilities are also insufficient for rural areas. Because of poor physical and social infrastructure, private banks and private businesses simply avoid rural areas.

With no private investors to supply seeds, fertiliser, farm machinery, credit (even banking services are lacking), no extension agent to introduce better technology, no serious research of farmers' problems and few roads to either bring in inputs or sell whatever meagre product is produced, expectations for agricultural development are limited.

Added to this are low rural education levels (sometimes no education at all), poor rural health conditions exacerbated in recent years by the spread of HIV/AIDS (adding to the existing problems of malaria, TB and parasites). It is no surprise that stagnation, hunger and poverty are endemic in these places. Two things are needed to stimulate agriculture and rural development in poor countries: for rich countries to reduce their agricultural protectionism, and for poor countries to demonstrate a true commitment to agriculture and rural development by investing in it and creating the appropriate investment climate for private investment. In countries trapped in civil strife, stability is an even more basic pre-requisite, with food aid and safety nets necessary in the short term. ♦ (IPS)

(Kevin Cleaver is director of Agriculture and Rural Development at the World Bank.)

Tight spot

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistani government faces an awkward situation on US plans to attack Iraq: backing Washington would stir trouble at home, but opposition would hurt its post-11 September ties with the superpower. At the same time, there is a clear national consensus that cuts across the political and ideological divides against the looming US attack on Iraq.

Progressive forces are denouncing it as a policy of expansionism and hegemony. The conservative right also opposes it, saying the United States has declared war on Islam. Religious parties have warned of a "serious" backlash if the government sides with Washington. The government has deliberately given statements that are open to different interpretations. No official has said that the country would support an attack on Iraq and contribute forces as it did in 1990-91 Gulf War. A member of the foreign office agreed that the government has deliberately adopted a policy of vagueness until the UN inspection process in Iraq is completed.

The clear anti-war opinion restrains the government from siding with Washington. But at the same time, it finds it difficult to side with international camp opposing Iraq war, as it would annoy the United States. The government is hard pressed to find middle ground. (IPS)

Gauging Beijing

BEIJING - On the second leg of his sensitive Asia mission, the United States' top diplomat, Secretary of State Colin Powell, found Chinese leaders more acquiescent on Iraq but less wavering on their long-time communist ally and neighbour, North Korea.

During talks with Chinese leaders, Powell tried to feel Beijing's pulse on the impending war with Iraq and Pyongyang's escalating nuclear crisis, just weeks before China formally completes a major generational change in leadership. Powell's mission in Beijing continued a long but quiet US effort to nudge Beijing towards taking stronger measures to curb North Korea's nuclear program.

Washington has been trying to persuade China to back its bid to tackle Pyongyang through "multilateral talks" involving China, Japan, South Korea, Russia and perhaps other countries. Plans to put pressure on North Korea to give up its nuclear program by placing it under a trade embargo could be blocked by China, one of North Korea's main trade partners. Most diplomats expect that Beijing's priority remains enlarging its influence in Washington over issues like bilateral trade, Taiwan and Tibet. They say that China will therefore avoid direct confrontation with the United States and abstain in any new vote for a second resolution on Iraq. (IPS)

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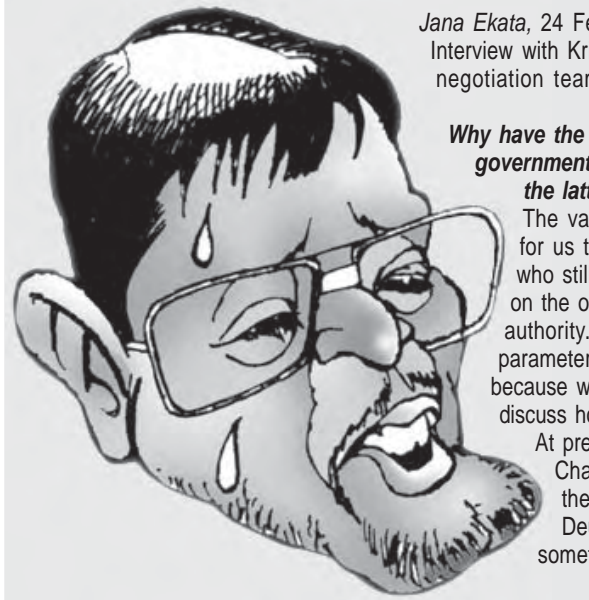
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Peace talks for all



Jana Ekata, 24 February
Interview with Krishna Bahadur Mahara, member of the Maoist negotiation team.

Why have the Maoists agreed to a ceasefire with the Chand government when all the other political parties denounced the latter as invalid and not legal?

The validity of the Chand government is not something for us to question. We'll leave that to the political parties who still function within the present constitution. As a force on the outside we don't recognise the present state authority. All political activities that take place within the parameters of the present state authority do not apply to us because we do not consider them legal. We are here to discuss how a true power of the people can be established. At present the king is in power and he put together the Chand government. The ceasefire was negotiated with the old regime that predates the governments of both Deuba and Chand. It is misleading to say we validated something we don't even acknowledge.

How do you respond to allegations from political parties that the ceasefire is an alliance between reactionary forces and the Maoists?

We are at war. If you analyse the ceasefire from that perspective you cannot call recent developments sudden. As far as "reactionary forces" are concerned, we have not agreed to any deals with the old regime nor do we have a secret pact with the monarchy. We put forward four demands—annulling the red corner notice, removing the terrorist tag, cancelling bounties from our heads and a dialogue on our political agendas. The state agreed to those and the ceasefire was eventually declared. Nothing has been agreed upon behind the curtains. People who don't stand to gain from the peace process are spreading these rumours.

We were willing to begin talks two months ago. We had also already chosen our negotiation team back then. During that time, we worked at establishing contact within the old regime. This progress may not have been possible had it taken place in the public eye. Furthermore, as a party waging an underground war, it wasn't necessary for our moves to be open and transparent.

Can you justify a ceasefire agreement that some factions are calling hurried at a time when the political parties were attempting to unite against the king's move?

This merely highlights contradictions within their arguments. If they paused to think, they would realise the ceasefire brought one more political force to their side. We have always been against the king's attempts to centralise power within the monarchy. We have repeatedly offered to join the other political parties to present a united front. The ceasefire is not a sign that we will follow the king blindly. It is up to the Nepali people to decide if they want the monarchy or not. This is why we put forward the agenda for a constituent assembly.

The proposed roundtable talk is mired in technicalities. Do the Maoists have a position on the nitty-gritty details that are taking so long to sort out?

At present the political parties, the Maoists and the monarchy are on different sides. We agree that the king has mishandled some things but we have no qualms about negotiating across a table called by the parties with the king's representatives or vice-versa. The important issue is sorting out the nation's agenda. Everyone should agree on this one point if we are to begin discussions. The question of who summons whom is trivial. Proving yourself on the battlefield is far more important.

The political parties allege that peace talks will be conducted solely between you and the current state authorities, relegating them to the role of witnesses.

We would not dream of sidelining the political parties from this process. GP Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nepal were among the first people with whom we discussed our political agenda. The fear that we will bypass the parties and conduct secret talks with the king worries those who focus on statecraft and not the state.

No singular power can run the state exclusively. Twelve years of democracy proved that the political parties alone cannot fulfill this task. And it would be foolishness on the king's part to imagine that he solely can govern the nation. We don't think we can do so single-handedly either. We are firm in our belief that unity is needed and this is something we are now ready for.

It seems like the peace process has stalled.

At present the old regime has not created a conducive environment for the peace talks to progress. We have not stalled anything, that accusation rests on the other side. We are the ones who not only have our negotiation team ready but also have publicly announced it to the people of Nepal. We have taken the first step.

We would like the talks to begin as soon as possible. We have made our intentions clear to the government but they don't seem serious. The nation will continue to flounder in this morass if a resolution is not reached. There have been no changes in military movement and the state seems insensitive and insincere about the peace talks. If the establishment conspires against us, we will be forced to use the people's action against them.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"Parties on opposite sides of a negotiating table may make high demands initially but they will agree on small fundamental points. Eventually, the Maoists will accept a monarchical system. Right now their primary desire is to emerge above ground."

-Padma Ratna Tuladhar, human rights activist and mediator for the proposed peace talk in Haak, 26 February.

Is everyone ready? On the count of three I'll release him—the rest of you arrest him immediately.

राजधानी Rajdhani, 22 February.

Empty vessels

New Everest Times,
20 February

An interview with former water resources minister and Nepali Congress central committee member, Baldev Sharma Majgaiya. Excerpts:

In what light does the Nepali Congress view recent political changes?

To begin with, there is nothing recent about the political changes we have witnessed, His Majesty's 4 October move and subsequent machinations were all pre-planned. But the Nepali Congress welcomes the ceasefire between the government and the Maoist insurgents. We hope for successful peace talks so that all those who had to flee their villages because of the Maoist violence can return home.

The Nepali Congress workers and supporters have suffered the most during the last seven years. Even ordinary people were punished if they voted for us. We don't want politics to disrupt the talks. With respect to this, the Nepali Congress has postponed a peaceful protest march against the 4 October declaration. However, we intend to make clear that we will not accept attempts, under any pretext, to nullify or make inactive the 1990 constitution.

How do you assess the Maoist demand for (holding elections to) a constituent assembly?

The cabinet ministers and the Maoists are talking about a constituent assembly, but their objectives and motivations are different. The latter have yet to make their position clear on whether they want a constituent assembly with or without the king as part of the deal. If the Maoists relinquish their demands for a republic and accept His Majesty as part of their constituent assembly, why should the nation accept this change of heart? The Maoists should make public their stand vis-à-vis the monarchy, the army, the country's security and police policies. We are not really

against a constituent assembly. But at a time when the king looks like he is trying to consolidate his position, we suspect a constituent assembly could just be a trap to do away with the 1990 constitution. This is why I usually liken discussions on a constituent assembly to an empty vessel cooking on a hot fire.

Has the agenda of the Nepali Congress changed?

The Nepali Congress is currently engaged in a campaign to bring the constitution back on track. So our main agenda is the restoration of the dissolved House of Representatives and a functional constitution. We believe all the problems the country faces, including the Maoist insurgency, can be resolved through parliamentary measures.

If the status quo was restored, the Maoists would not have to resort to clandestine meetings shrouded in secrecy with different power centres.

The Nepali Congress is also engaged in the organisation of a nationwide non-violent movement, if the situation demands, with other parliamentary parties to reclaim executive power from His Majesty.

Held hostage

Nepal Samacharpatra,
24 February

For the last three months, Dipak Bahadur Thapa, a local reporter for Nepal Samacharpatra has been held hostage in his village of Darna VDC in far-western Achham district. Maoist cadres in the "people's government" have warned of dire consequences should he disobey the order and leave. According to local journalists, the Maoists have accused Thapa of writing against the "people's war" and supporting the "reactionary government".

What is intriguing is the Maoists have refused to lift the ban on Thapa's free movement even three weeks after the declaration of a ceasefire between the Maoists and the government on 29 January.



Stand united

Barbara Admas in Jana Aastha,
26 February

The expatriate community was united in lighting oil lamps for peace at Bouddha last weekend. Can't Nepal's politicians light lamps for peace in a more concrete way by validating the peace process? While foreign leaders openly advocate war, how can Nepali leaders lag behind? The Nepali Congress leader Gitiya Prasad Koirala recently said the ceasefire declared without the consensus of the political parties has created chaos among the people. I would like to ask him what does he mean: an all party consensus or a public consensus? Are we wrong to believe that 99.99 percent of the Nepali people are in favour of peace? Doesn't this best reflect the consensus among the public?

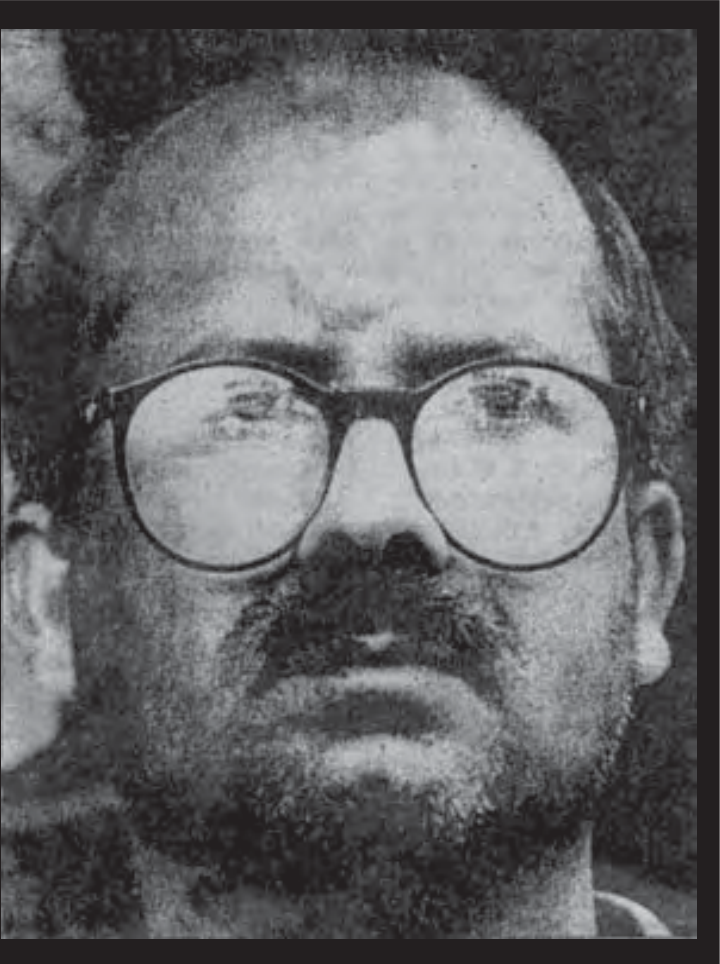
I am amazed that the main political parties and their leaders are more interested in "restoring democracy" than in restoring peace and giving relief to rural Nepalis. The people know that for the last 12 years they got nothing from these leaders. The people want peace and relief, haven't the parties realised this yet?

I would call upon Nepali women to play a major role in the peace talks. I had heard women played a very significant role within the Maoist movement but they haven't appointed even a single woman to their negotiation team. Does this mean women should kill and be killed like men but cannot represent her kind in the peace talks?

Mug shot

Ghatna Ra Bichar, 26 February

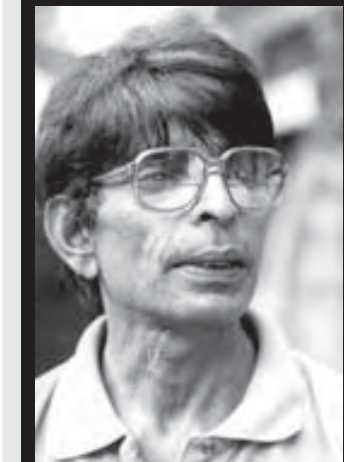
The UML general secretary doesn't like his own picture. He is outraged about a photograph (right) published by Ghatna Ra Bichar in its 19 February issue. Madhav Kumar Nepal is so livid about this picture that he is out bashing all Nepali-language papers in town. He was particularly venomous about Kantipur, saying it published lies. "They all want to defame me," Nepal said. "Ghatna Ra Bichar has made it a mission to defame me. Look at my picture on their first page. It is scary...unshaven and with fogged up glasses...They stand to gain nothing from showing me in such an unflattering way." He accused the editor of the paper of belittling him, and warned other papers to stop the "baseless and bad publicity campaign" adding "we can initiate a similar campaign against them (the editors)".



HISTORY AND CULTURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

NEPALITERATURE



The following text is translated from Khagendra Sangraula's latest book of essays, *Aama ra Yamadootharu* (Bhudiipuran Prakashan, Bhadau 2059), a book critiquing the emotional blackmail that the Garood Purnan, traditionally read during the 13 day mourning period, inflicts upon the family of the deceased in order to extract large donations for the priest. Sangraula's critique is completely godless, and refreshing exactly for this. The passage below is one of the book's more personal chapters, saying much about women's identity in village Nepal.

A person's name is very much a private medium through which to contact the world, a medium through which to interact with the world. Each person is a distinct singularity of the social whole, as well as an autonomous power. Our name is the medium of the emanation of our particularity, of our autonomy. Yet my mother was nameless: nameless, and in a sense, without recognition. I realised this in a way that pierced my heart after she passed away at my house in Kathmandu.

"How many people came to the funeral procession?" This question was tossed at me at my brother's house in Birtamod, after the first part of the grieving observances were over. This question was voiced by my sisters, who as women had been kept from the grieving site, in essence delegating them to the Vaishya caste.

In response I said, "There were many people." "About how many?" "Maybe a hundred, a hundred and fifty." "Were there any big-name politicians?" "CP Mainali was there." "Was KP Sharma Oli there?" Because Oliji was the parliamentary representative from Birtamod, this latter question was tinged with hues of local sentiment. The question was Sainla Dai's: He lived here. "He wasn't there," I said. "He probably didn't receive word." "Who else was there?" "Most of them were writers and artists, my familiars and well-wishers."

"And others?" "Friends from the neighbourhood." The size of the funeral procession and the attendance of renowned and popular figures became a matter of prestige for our family. Everyone was pleased, becoming efflorescent and roused. Yet those who had attended the funeral procession hadn't known my mother's name. They were unknown members of the cortege of some nameless body. It is natural that our recognition should be as expansive or as confined as our social reach, our position and our

REVIEW

My mother Bhagirathaa KHAGENDRA SANGRAULA

creative contribution. But no matter what the level of our recognition, everyone has a separate, special name within his or her social parameters. My mother had no name or distinct image. It is an age-old law that a son should be known by his mother's name and a mother be known by her son's name. But it is like going unrecognised for a completely nameless mother to be known by her son's name.

When I think back to this I feel an intense bitterness. After our mother's death, her namelessness became a matter of great disappointment and torment for my sisters. Mother's body had already been cremated at the Arya Ghat at Pashupati. The remaining ashes had been swept up and immersed in the Bagmati River. After washing the sacred platform where the funeral rites had been performed, the priest initiated an offering of a ball of rice and water for the departed soul.

He asked, "The name of the deceased?"

What was my mother's name? I asked myself this question in confusion. Mother's name had never, anywhere, under any circumstance, been required throughout her life. She had never had a chance to go to school, so her name never made it to an attendance register, a marks sheet or a certificate. Father's name enjoyed sole rights over all the deeds and documents of home finances. There was never any room on those papers for Mother's name. It was Father's name that got written down on donations and offerings. The census? I do not know whether the census teams ever made it to my birthplace in that remote, inaccessible eastern corner of Nepal's topography. If they ever went there, I do not know what they wrote down as Mother's name. And what of the government ledgers on which the names of adult citizens are written for voting? I don't know about that either. I don't know if Mother's name had been required for my sisters' naming ceremonies: I had not followed those ceremonies carefully. There was no context in which I heard my mother's name so that I could remember it later in adulthood. Now the priest at the Arya Ghat was asking: "What was the name of the deceased?"

By some memory or impression, the name Narwadaa Devi flashed in my mind. It offered me—a son struggling for his mother's name—immense assistance. Yes, for certain, this was Mother's name—Narwadaa Devi Sangraula! Seeing the need for the name passing away, I felt like I had rediscovered Mother's forgotten name. I hurriedly told the priest what it was; and a ball of rice and water were offered to Narwadaa Devi's soul.

It was perhaps the next day that the weekly *Jana Ekata* carried a touching headline of my bereavement, under which was printed a

Someone else's country

Identity lies at the centre of Tsering Wangmo's poetry.



with it as I read:

100 kilos of sugar
100 packets of Taj tea.
Total = 2,000 rupees.

What is at stake in this first volume of poems is identity. In the various "places called home/ in someone else's country" as the narrator comes to see herself through "the daily rituals and the yearly ones", Tsering Wangmo looks to those who share her exile's journey. Spoken of and heard, yet revealed only with reticence (named simply by letters: M – F – S), it is, above all, M, who offers guidance.

The Tara statue had tears in its eyes. The caretaker produced the piece of scrap paper he used to wipe it off. Words ran into each other where water touched ink like meandering veins in a frayed wrist. The monk blessed himself

When the thermos shatters, she knows the direction of its spill. She knows how to lead and follow. Know her from this.

In these uncertain situations, it is not the kindness of strangers that she has to rely on, but the ways of her family, the rules of her house that she must learn from.

The insight gained from this vantage is that language and how it is used determines the way the world is known. This is finally Tsering Wangmo's strategy in writing the book. Hers is a consciousness that registers and waits, that gains mastery by observing and setting down without distortion what one becomes attuned to. By taking in hand a fate that is, more often than not, out of her hands, her identity is formed, and in the writing, reclaimed.

AS REMEMBERED

I am only beginning to understand how seasons affect me.

Winter. Snow beating street people into obedience. How mothers held back from stepping out in discreetly ornamented shoes and thin nylon socks.

This is the way I count years: the winters we had

fire and the summers we erased because we were in another place.

I am told I was five in 1971 even though my birth certificate states I was born in 1969. The elders count on their fingers. They have done it for a long time.

It was winter but not the kind of winter they were born into. They were wearing hand knitted woolen sweaters. I was wearing a jacket that children born of refugees wear.

When I am with them, I cannot say I remember. I say as I am told. I remember.

It is not the accuracy of the story that concerns us.

But who gets to tell it.

With the simplest of descriptions, Tsering Wangmo portrays the predicament of displacement and of her need to recall it.

ONE MORE SAY

Think on this when prayers fall like thick paint on asphalt.

Think on this when the face is fading.

Think on this and be decisive in your motions.

The breathing. The utterance.

No Eastern star leading conch shells and a rainbow at dusk. Those who must believe, do.

Who dares to question the accuracy of a direction when the journey was not theirs.

The moment of birth. Before the father extended his arm towards the mother.

Here is a location. Here is a scattering like mustard seeds.

With this final placement and dislocation, with this singular image held within the rhythm of language, Tsering Wangmo tells us what it is (for a person, for a people) to lose one's home and to set forth in the world for another. For the child taken along on that journey, the voice of memory becomes through the insight gained in these poems, the voice of experience.

(Wayne Amtzis is a photographer and writer who lives in Kathmandu.)

Rules of the House
by Tsering Wangmo Dhomba
Apogee Press, \$12.95
Berkeley, California
www.apogeepress.com

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Cycling for Peace** by Pushkar Shah at Lazimpat Gallery Café from 2-8 March.
- ❖ **Mapping Modernity in Nepal** 5-18 March at Nepal Arts Council, Babar Mahal. wavetex@wlink.com.np
- ❖ **Photographs by Tashi Ghale** at Via Via Travelers Café, Thamel. www.viaviacafe.com
- ❖ **Themes in Jewellery** by Angela Dodson Soulier, 8-18 March, Indigo Gallery.
- ❖ **Jazzmandu 2003** 16 days of jazz from 28 February-15 March. Tickets: Upstairs Jazz Bar. 410436
- ❖ **Sundar Shanta Nepal: Shanti Sangeet Yatra 2059** till 8 March. Details: 542544, 537799
- ❖ **Peace Rally** from Patan Durbar Square 2PM on 2 March. Youth Initiative for Peace (YIP) - Nepal. 535521

EVENTS

- ❖ **10km Walkathon** for St Xavier's School scholarship fund. 8AM from the school on 1 March. 521050
- ❖ **Biking down to Kathmandu** Mountain bike tour 1 March. 539900/ 545990
- ❖ **Love is in the Air** Promote sterilisation of pets. Reduced rates till 14 March. 414332.
- ❖ **The Birthday Cake** Dinner theatre. 6-8 March Hotel Yak & Yeti. Proceeds to The Ganesh Foundation.
- ❖ **A Night at Lal Durbar** 28 February. Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999

MUSIC

- ❖ **The Prism** plays at the Jazz Bar every Friday at Shangri-la Hotel, Kathmandu. 412999
- ❖ **Gaines** Traditional Nepali music at Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 680083

FOOD

- ❖ **Losar celebrations** 3-5 March at Stupa View Vegetarian Restaurant and Terrace. 480262
- ❖ **Cafe Mitra goes Chinese** Wednesday night with guest chef Ranjana Yonzone from 5 March. 259015
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 680083
- ❖ **Sekuwa Saanjh** Friday BBQ at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ❖ **Breakfast 100 Club** at 1905 Weekends in March with Thomas Kilroy at 1905, Kantipath. 225272

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse**, near Thimi. 631734.
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights** Traditional cottage with modern facilities. www.escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Ultimate Bungy** at The Last Resort. 439525

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

VIS-27-02-2003 03:00 GMT

Bang on schedule for Shivaratri on Saturday we have rain forecast, as this westerly over Pakistan we see in the satellite picture taken on Wednesday arrives over Nepal. Expect light to moderate rain, snow at higher altitudes over the weekend. Cloudy nights will raise the minimum temperature and the lower maximum temperature. So a return to wintry conditions until the sun comes out again next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 27-07	Sat 21-10	Sun 22-09	Mon 23-09	Tue 24-08
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Times in Delhi

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BOOKWORM

Natural wonders of India & Nepal Biswajit Roy Chowdhury, Buroshiva Dasgupta, Indira Bhattacharya
New Holland
Rs 2,400

This book takes readers on a visual adventure through the continent's wildest and unspoiled places, while maps and fact panels in each chapter tell them how to get there through pertinent information on location, permits, facilities, best time to go and what to see.

Leopard Gerald Hinde
Harper Collins
Rs 2,000

Hinde is one of the few people to unravel the leopard enigma having watched and photographed them for over 10 years. This book is a culmination of all he has learnt. The stunning photographs it contains are rare in the depiction of leopards at intimate moments.

Tiger: The secret life Valmik Thapar Photographs by Fateh Singh Rathore
Elm Tree Books
Rs 2,160

The author and photographer spent many years in Ranthambore studying tigers and their habitat. This book contains extraordinary photo documentation of three tigresses with cubs of different ages and lays to rest the myth that adult male tigers kill their young.

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

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Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा

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Sun-Fri	0800- 0830	डबली (विषयगत अन्तरक्रिया)
Sun-Fri	2000- 2030	आजका कुरा (समासमयिक विषयमा बहस)
Sat	0800- 0830	शान्ति अभियान
Sat	1930- 2030	आचार विचार (छप्ताचारविषय सहकार्य)
Sat	2000- 2030	कूटनीतिक मञ्च

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Music to our ears

The newly-established Music Institute of Kathmandu strikes the right note for serious musicians.

BAR INDRAWATI

... after sunset, waiting for the sunrise ...

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WORKSHOPS
Sessions conducted by some Jazzmandu musicians including Natalie Williams and Nick Aggs will be held on 11-30 AM from 4 March at the American Centre in Gyaneshwor. For details call 427527.

The Music Institute of Kathmandu (MIK) had a phoenix like beginning: it rose from the ashes of Elite's Co-ed music department, one that Cadenza drummer and frontman, Navin Chhettri (top, left), has been involved with as a music teacher for the past few years. With a 15-member faculty and a fully equipped music department, Elite's had one of the best music programs for students in the Valley. With the school on the verge of closure, Navin saw an opportunity to realise a project that is close to his heart.

"MIK has been a dream for a long time," he says. Still in the planning stages, Navin has worked to bring together the former teachers of Elite's music department and his fellow musicians to teach everything from rock to jazz. The faculty also includes Nepali classical musicians like Robin Lal who plays the *tabla*, the vocalist Gurudev and Santosh Bhakt who will teach the *ishraj*.

Affiliated to the Trinity College of London, 25 percent of the profits from Jazzmandu 2003 has been earmarked for MIK by Chhedup Bomzan of Upstairs Ideas, the promotion agency behind the jazz festival and incidentally, Cadenza's manager. He confessed the profits from last year's festival were paltry but contributing from that was symbolic of their commitment towards creating a space for Nepali musicians. "Navin, Susan (co-ordinator of Jazzmandu) and I always wanted to promote jazz in Nepal and MIK will be a place not only for learning the ABC's but more importantly, also for taking musicians to that next level," says Chhedup.

The institute will start with music clinics headed by some of the international artists at Jazzmandu. The formal program is scheduled to begin in April with certificate courses that run from six months to a full year as well as short crash courses. Initially, it will operate from the Elite music department after school hours before moving to another premise. Navin hopes this will encourage people, old and young, to fit music into their lives. "I am sceptical about the response," he says, "because people here look upon music as a hobby. Those who come to us may not be as committed to the craft as I would like."

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

BY OUR EXTRA-SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KUALA LUMPUR - The richest leaders of the world's poorest countries wrapped up a multi-million dollar summit in the Malaysian capital Tuesday after passing a resolution in which they promised hereinafter to remember to send telegraphic greetings to each other during their respective National Days.
Members of the Re-aligned Movement (RAM) unanimously approved a proposal tabled by the delegation from the Kingdom of Nepal (and seconded by the Kingdom of Tonga) expressing concern that some heads-of-state were getting too big for their boots and were not returning greetings sent by smaller countries.
"Sending these telegrams is an internationally accepted norm of civilised behaviour between nations, and failure to do so could jeopardise world peace," a visibly upset head of the Nepali delegation told a packed press meet. "We send greetings to every single head of state in the world every year wishing them personal

The Re-aligned Movement

happiness and progress on their National Day, but only a handful of them reciprocate the gesture on our National Day. If they think that we are going to take this lying down, they are mistaken. We are going to take this sitting up."
In an ominous move, Nepal said its germs were so far deployed in peaceful civilian use for water-borne gastric infections, but warned: "We can easily covert this into a transboundary germ warfare program if the big countries refuse to greet us on our National Day."
News that Nepal may be engaged in clandestinely developing biological weapons of mass destruction spread through the corridors of the Re-aligned Summit, and even made it to the News Bar on CNN. After that, presidents, prime ministers, sheikhs, potentates, despots and junta leaders from all 115 re-aligned members voted "yes" on the resolution, with two abstentions.
In other developments in the sidelines of the summit, the Re-aligned Movement finally managed to broker a solution to the Kashmir Dispute. Members leaned on India and Pakistan on an annual rotation of sovereignty over Kashmir. Under the arrangement, India will possess the Himalayan state during odd years, and Pakistan during even years. The negotiations nearly broke down when a heated dispute erupted between Islamabad and New Delhi over which side should be allocated even years since the country that got the Leap Year could keep Kashmir for one more day.
A nuke exchange was averted as the two reached a compromise to divide 29 February into two 12-hour segments. The whole process will be enforced by international monitors with digital stopwatches. Despite this landmark settlement, leaders of India and Pakistan steadfastly refused to hold hands in public for the duration of the summit.
In their final communique, re-aligned nations agreed they would not attack, annex, invade or force a regime change in any other state without first saying "please". ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Kunti's triple trophy

“Nepal is beautiful, but we could do with some peace," says Kunti Moktan, who is among a dozen Nepali singers touring the country for "Sundar Shanta Nepal" a series of peace concerts culminating in a grande finale in Kathmandu on 8 March.
And that will be exactly a month after Kunti bagged three trophies in this year's HITS FM Music awards. The award ceremony had a lot of firsts: the first time artificial snow rained down in the hall, the first time a singer zoomed off-stage pillion riding (with a helmet) on a motorcycle, the first time the lead singer arrived at the BICC on a helicopter...and the first time a female singer bagged three of the main awards.
When Kunti Moktan alighted from the Ecuirel helicopter in front of the conventional hall that afternoon, she knew it was going to be an exciting day. But not *that* exciting. By the end of the evening, as she did a Norah Jones, bagging one award after another, (Best Female Vocal Performance, Album of the Year and Record of the Year) she was in seventh heaven.
"What can I say? I'm happy, elated, euphoric, delighted," Kunti gushed before flying off to Bharain for a pre-arranged concert tour for Nepalis there. Kunti had expected at the most one award, but when she got three she, her song-writing husband and two daughters didn't have their feet on the ground any longer. It was all the more praise-worthy because the nominees in all three categories were top class—symbolising the great strides that Nepali music has taken in terms of originality and professionalism.
Kunti has wanted to sing ever since she can remember. Born in a tea garden in Darjeeling 41 years ago, she enjoyed listening and singing songs right from her childhood. Kunti started recording songs for AIR Kurseong in 1977, but was not satisfied. She wanted to reach out to a wider Nepali audience. So, she came to Kathmandu. "It was the right decision," she recalls. Her first song on Radio Nepal in 1980 was "*Kahile kahin malai pani*" became an instant hit and launched Kunti's career.
Kunti feels the Nepali music industry has now reached critical mass: musicians and singers can make a living out of the profession, they don't need to keep a salaried job elsewhere. And despite the inroads of television and FM, Nepali music has grown, proving wrong those who thought Nepal would be overtaken by Bollywood songs and American pop.
The other phenomenon that Kunti finds heartening is that all the songs that won awards had folk elements in them. "You may like the occasional pizza, but sooner or later you come back to your *dhedo* and *gundruk*," she says. And anyone who has felt like getting up to dance to the pure-Nepali rhythms of "*Dharan Dhankuta*" will know what she means. ♦

NILODHAR MAN

	Date	Time	Venue	Local Organizer
Bharain	Feb 22	2:00 pm	Public High School Ground	Bharain Bika School, Public High School
Betashab	Feb 24	2:00 pm	Siddhanta Bhai School Ground	Siddhanta Secondary School
Batnai	Feb 26	2:00 pm	Kalka Bhai School Ground	Kalka Secondary School
Makundeshwari	Mar 1	2:00 pm	Khula Marsh	Nawal Pothari Kalkar Sangam, Kathmandu Football Association, NGO Federation
Tatopani, Dang	Mar 3	2:00 pm	Aranika Ground	Lions Club, Rotary Club, Young Star Cricket Club, Youth Service Fund
Kumeshwari	Mar 6	2:00 pm	Bhatbhatari	Pedana Parvati School, Dhulikhel

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