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Times

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Weekly Internet Poll # 86

Q. How do you assess the pace of the peace talks between the government and the Maoists?

Satisfactory 27.2%

Unsatisfactory 25.3%

Too Slow 47.5%

Total votes: 1,203

Weekly Internet Poll # 87. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the CIAA's current anti-graft campaign against senior political figures?

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NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
in NAMCHE BAZAR

If Thursday was anything to go by, this will be a wild week on Sagarmatha in the run-up to 29 May, the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of the world's highest mountain.

One after another, the records are falling. For the past four days, 70-year-old Yuichiro Miura and his 20-year-old son, Gota, have been waiting out high winds at 8,200m to make their summit bid. On Thursday morning, Miura Sr became the oldest man ever to climb Mt Everest, and this is the longest anyone has spent above 8,000m. Thirty-three years ago, he had skied down Everest, braking by deploying a parachute.

After days of fierce winds, nearly 150 climbers from 25 expeditions have been moving up the mountain from the Nepali side, and 30 expeditions from the north. Till presstime Thursday, some 26 Nepalis and 11 international climbers got to the top from the south.

Eleven Nepalis were from an Indo-Nepali army expedition in which three Indians also reached the summit. Then there was the famous South Korean, Um Hong-Gil who has climbed all 14 peaks in the world higher than 8,000m, and has done Everest three times now from different directions.

Others to get on top Thursday were the Irish, Belgians, Chinese and a Russian who climbed from the north without

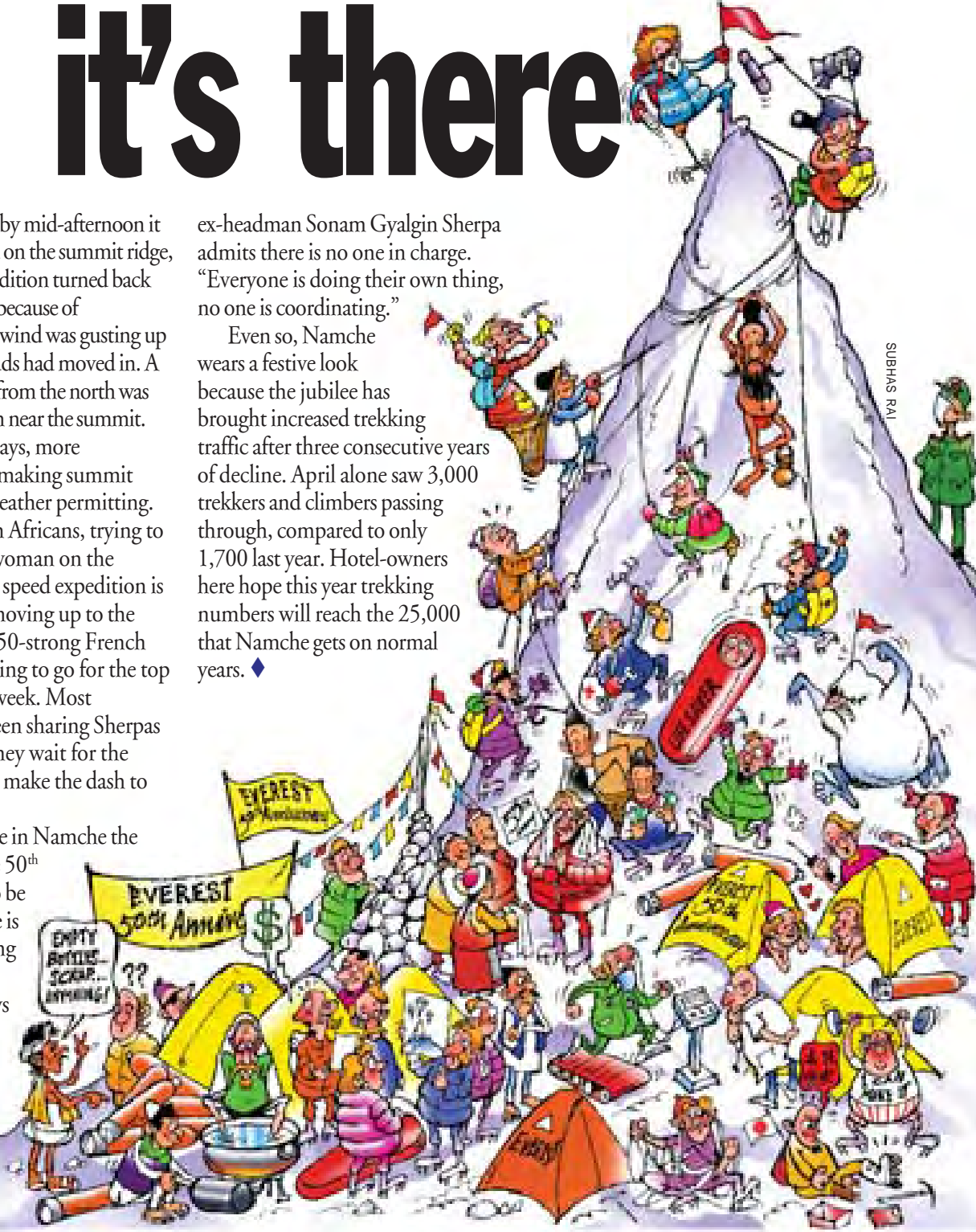
bottled oxygen. But by mid-afternoon it was getting crowded on the summit ridge, and at least one expedition turned back from the South Col because of overcrowding. The wind was gusting up to 60 knots and clouds had moved in. A Chinese expedition from the north was forced to return from near the summit.

In the coming days, more expeditions will be making summit bids—traffic and weather permitting. There are the South Africans, trying to put the first black woman on the summit, the Italian speed expedition is acclimatising and moving up to the South Col and the 50-strong French expedition is planning to go for the top in two groups this week. Most expeditions have been sharing Sherpas to fix ropes while they wait for the weather window to make the dash to the summit.

Meanwhile, here in Namche the celebrations for the 50th anniversary seem to be disorganised. There is a Hillary statue being unveiled, but not even his sister knows where and when. There is supposed to be a party in Tengboche for Reinhold Messner, but the locals have no idea. Namche's

ex-headman Sonam Gyalgin Sherpa admits there is no one in charge. "Everyone is doing their own thing, no one is coordinating."

Even so, Namche wears a festive look because the jubilee has brought increased trekking traffic after three consecutive years of decline. April alone saw 3,000 trekkers and climbers passing through, compared to only 1,700 last year. Hotel-owners here hope this year trekking numbers will reach the 25,000 that Namche gets on normal years. ♦



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POLITICALLY INCORRECT

What is it with our politics that anytime anyone has a grudge against anyone else, it is the classrooms that get bombed, teachers that get harassed, schools that get padlocked, universities that get shut down, and children that get forced to join political rallies?

Nepal's education system, or what remains of it, has been the first target of every political agitation. The Maoists demolished the national school system in the two years of mayhem in which hundreds of teachers were killed, tortured and hounded out of the villages. Schools across the land were forced to close down, and in many places they remain closed. Their rationale was the irrational logic of revolutions: destroy everything before rebuilding.

It is a legacy of the Panchayat that underground political parties exerted their presence through student wings, turning campuses into hotbeds of political dissent. Nothing wrong with that, of course, a politically active academia was at the vanguard of the Peoples' Movement that ushered in democracy in 1990.

But by trying to resurrect the conditions of 12 years ago, political parties are flogging a dead horse. And by deliberately targeting schools and adopting the same tactics of intimidation, arson and vandalism as the Maoists, the parties' student wings have shown themselves to be no better. But the blame lies with their political mentors for whom all this is just an extension of their continuing parlour games. Instead of closing down schools, why don't they take volunteer cadre to remote schools which have been without teachers for years? Instead of forcing buses off the roads and shutting down the country, why not repair trails and bridges destroyed by the insurgents? Who said protest always has to be destructive to make a political point?

One can trace this lack of imagination primarily to the degradation of our education system over the past 40 years. Reforming the school system is therefore the priority for long-term evolution of a democratic and non-violent political culture. But if the school system itself is the chief target of coercion, how are we ever going to come out of this rut? It is time to take the goal of declaring schools a politics-free zone seriously, and take the schools out of the hands of power manipulators.

The past 12 years of democracy turned the streets, and not parliament, into an arena for the battle of wills between parties. In fact, our inspiration seems to come from the political badlands of Bihar and Bangladesh. So, if an opposition party doesn't like the ruling party, it will bring the country to a halt. And vice versa when tables are turned. The motto seems to be: if I don't like you, I'll punish the people. The country's citizens end up paying for the reckless selfishness of greedy politicians who don't give a damn what happens to our nation.

We are paying the price for this now. Politicians who wrecked the country in the name of democracy for the past 12 years have shown they haven't reformed, their modus operandi is still the same, and we can expect identical behaviour when they return to power. How are we going to break this paralyzing cycle of ruin?

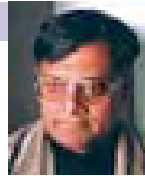
The present state of flux actually presents an opportunity for reform. And that initiative rests with King Gyanendra, who by his act of taking on executive powers through a nominated cabinet will have to show required statesmanship. A meeting with the parties to come up with a new interim team to prepare for elections is long overdue. What is preventing him from doing this?

The king's advisers should note: the lack of public support for the street agitation does not mean that the Nepali people want a return to pre-1990 autocracy.

STATE OF THE STATE

A comrade comes calling

by CK LAL



...to say the commissars are alarmed about Pax Americana.

For a leader of his stature, Comrade Matrika Prasad Yadav is exceedingly modest. Instead of calling someone to his den, he prefers to call on them. Dressed simply in khadis, he arrives five minutes before the appointed time. As an alternate politburo member of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist), Comrade Matrika is entitled to party protection: two alert guards shadow him wherever he goes. On Sunday, one of them was in combat fatigues, and that created problems when the Royal Nepali Army detained his entourage for almost two hours in Salyan.

While the lone Madhesi Maoist negotiator is in Kathmandu (the capital of the "old regime") one of his guards often doubles as his PA, passing him the cellphone after making sure that the call is from someone safe. But if you refer to him as a PA, he lashes back, "We have no assistants, only comrades."

Comrade Matrika opens the discussion on a generous note, "We have highly valued your intellectual contributions to the cause of social transformation in the past." Then his voice takes on a steady tone, "However, when anyone indulges in malicious propaganda against us, we take due note of that too."

Perhaps he realises that he hasn't been

all that reassuring to his host. So he adds, "We hold no grudges against people like you. Our actions are aimed only against class enemies. We hold independent intellectuals in high esteem." For over an hour, we discuss the problems of Madhes in Nepal and the Maoists' method of handling it. Like most of his naive cadres, Comrade Matrika seems to put his faith in the political rhetoric of his leaders. "Round table, interim government, and constituent assembly," he chants the Maoist mantra with quiet reverence. It is pointless to argue against the faith of an extremist—be he a Maoist revolutionary, a *jihadi*, or a neocon Bush warrior.

Speaking of which, it is America that worries Comrade Matrika. He agrees it was the fear of direct American intervention that prompted the Maoists to come back to the negotiating table. And like Palestinian children, the Nepali proletariat too is ready for a prolonged struggle against imperialists. But the Maoists say they do not want to be the main cause of drawing the tentacles of Pentagon into this region.

The Palestinian struggle has become a global icon of resistance against aggression. Even the Maoists of Malangwa and Myagdi seem to draw inspiration from the TV images of children stonine tanks on the

streets of the Occupied Territories.

Such images strike a chord with the suppressed anywhere in the world as they fight entrenched power, and it inspires those who struggle against injustice and inequality.

Maoists have prevailed over state forces in almost every encounter in nearly two years, except one or two rebel offensives that went wrong. It is not surprising that the Maoist militia have little respect for the fighting ability of their peers in the Royal Nepali Army. Even young Maoist fighters barely out of their teens openly boast that they can easily lay their hands on the army's new rifles if instructed to do so.

The insurgents do not seem to be too bothered about the Indian armed intervention either and reject such a possibility.

"But even if they were foolhardy enough to send in the Indian Gurkhas," says a young Maoist cadre, "we could keep them engaged for years." He cites the way the Indian Army has been tied up in Kashmir and the northeast for decades by tiny insurgency groups, often fighting more amongst themselves than with the invaders. "And didn't they run away from Sri Lanka with their tails in between their legs?"

Surprisingly, it is the growing influence of the Americans that worries Comrade Matrika more. Reading between the lines and peering through the thickets of jargon he seems more worried about the US marines in Kalikot, or a B-52 from Diego Garcia laying waste to training camps in northern Rukum. Nepali Maoists do not want the fate of Afghanistan to befall their country.

Senior Maoist leaders believe that they have to keep talking with this government for as long as it takes them to keep Americans away. For them, the People's Movement II is a peripheral issue. "The parties will withdraw the moment we go back to the jungles," he says with barely-veiled disdain in his voice as he prepares to leave.

Despite the ceasefire, a police van invariably tails Comrade Matrika's team of Maoist rebels wherever he goes. Evidently, the state has taken full responsibility for the personal safety of the Maoist delegation. But Matrika Yadav doesn't give the blue van a glance, like his supremo he seems more worried about the Americans. ♦



LETTERS

1,000 WORDS

Do pictures, like history, repeat themselves? I found an uncanny similarity between Min Bajracharya's picture of democracy activist Durga Thapa and Steve McCurry's famous photograph of the Afghan girl, Sharbat Gula. The photographers not only recorded and created history with their shots, but neither knew they would follow their subjects and catch them later in life. McCurry didn't even know the name of the girl on the cover of *National Geographic*. She was



barely twelve in 1985, but her image with piercing green eyes became an instant icon of a war weary Afghanistan. Then, 17 years later McCurry traced her and photographed Sharbat the woman. Bajracharya also did not know Durga when he immortalised her on film and the picture went on to become the symbol of the 1990 People's Movement. Durga's 'comeback' in pro-democracy posters 14 years later carries a different message: a yearning for peace.

Binita Joshi Shrestha, email

BIPALIS

Re: 'Bipalis' (Artha Beed, #145) and other articles about the salaries received by Nepalis abroad. I am pained by the humiliation, exploitation and frustrations of our fellow citizens. It is all the result of a poor education system and lack of information that exposes them to the misery. The bargaining should not begin with what workers earn in Nepal, but with the value of their work. To blame, are those who have access to this information- those who have the

ability to organise better working conditions, and yet still don't do anything. University professors who teach international law, labour laws, market economy and human resources development should feel ashamed for not doing anything. Their job is not just restricted to the classroom and should include research, education and reform. Labour importing countries have minimum wage laws, many will enforce them, and in the case of Korea, companies pay even more than what the Nepali agencies demanded! Labour agents play a key role in the absence of government concern. They want to pay a reasonable amount, make reasonable profit and continue their business. The Nepali media has an important role to play in collecting and disseminating information which is lacking.

Hari Pokharel, Taiwan

SAVE OUR SCHOOL

After failing in our attempts to salvage our school, we have no recourse but to write to you on behalf of Kanya Mandir, the first school for girls established 57 years

ago in Nheokha and inaugurated by King Tribhuban. It was set up by a group of far-sighted educationists dedicated to the empowerment of girl children. By 1970 there were more than 1,450 students, and many of them excelled in the SLC exams. Kanya Mandir came to be known for the quality of its instruction and counts many illustrious women in its alumni. Today, over-commercialisation has taken its toll on the quality of instruction. As an English teacher who has spent 33 years in this school, I and my colleagues want it to regain its lost dignity. What we need is a school management committee made up of members with the vision of its founders, and this is why I am making this appeal through your paper.

Raj Bahadur Manandhar, Nheokha

NO GUNSHIPS

I couldn't agree more with the gist of the article 'Why do we need tanks?' (#145). As a former military man myself, I can tell you that a country does not ensure its security

by amassing military hardware—especially when the threat is an internal insurgency. The answer is for the rulers in Kathmandu to make sure that all Nepalis have equal opportunities, no one is left out, everyone has enough to eat, has affordable and proper health care, decent jobs and a decent livelihood. And for hard-working and generous people like Nepalis (it's only the governing elite in Kathmandu which is lazy and selfish) that is not such a tall order. Tanks and helicopter gunships will just fatten some arms merchants, make the military more macho and ensure that in future we kill our own brothers and sisters more efficiently.

GB Thapa, Hong Kong

• Thank you for 'Why do we need tanks?'. It seems things in Nepal are just as bad there as elsewhere. I wonder what the army is going to do with the tanks and helicopter gunships. The soldiers probably need better boots and food.

R Thapa, Texas, USA

NATION

OPINION

Something has happened to democracy in the sense of popularly elected government, and it has happened all over the world. Somehow people have lost faith in elections.

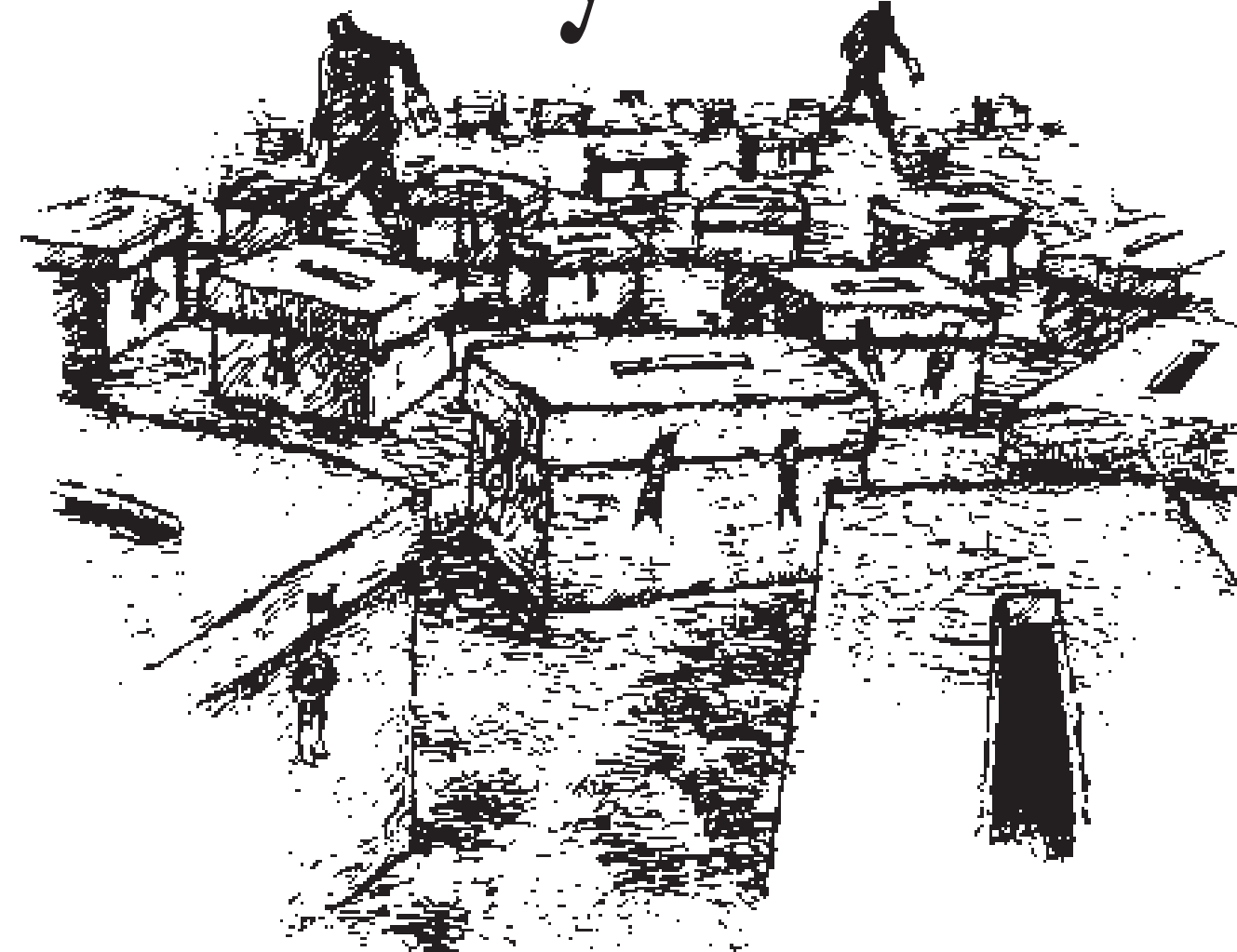
Turnout is declining in many countries; in the case of elections to the European Parliament, the level of voter participation is so low as to call into question the legitimacy of the result. But turnout apart, we have become accustomed to accepting that parties or candidates who receive 25 percent of the popular vote are "winners". From Holland and Finland to Argentina and Japan, majority governments are formed with minority support.

Nor are the apparent exceptions proof to the contrary. Few American presidents have been supported by much more than 10 percent of eligible voters: half of the US's eligible voters, indeed, are not even registered to vote; of those who are registered, half do not vote. Of those who do vote, less than half vote for the winning candidate. Even Tony Blair's "landslide" majority in Britain's House of Commons rests on shaky ground: Labour received just over 40 percent of the vote with a 60 percent turnout at the last election in 2002. So only 24 percent of the total electorate supported Blair's party.

In most countries, this is clearly very different from what elections looked like twenty, let alone fifty, years ago. What has happened? One answer must be that voters distrust political parties. Electoral democracy operates in most countries through the intermediary of organisations which put up candidates representing specific bundles of policy options, a "manifesto" or a "platform". For a number of reasons, however, this time-honoured practice no longer works.

Ideological party platforms have lost their force; voters do not accept the specific bundles offered by parties but

Democracy disconnect



Why are people losing faith in the ballot box?

want to pick and choose. Moreover, political parties have become "machines" made up of highly organised cadres of insiders. The paradox here is that parties have become more tribal having lost their ideological distinctiveness. It is more important to belong than to have a certain set of beliefs.

Such developments removed parties from the ambit of voters. Because most people don't particularly want to belong to a party, playing the party game becomes a minority sport. This increases the public's suspicion of political parties, not least because—like all professional sports—playing the game is expensive.

If the cost is borne by the taxpayer, it is resented. But if parties are not state-

supported, they must find funds through channels that are often dubious, when not illegal. Many of the great political scandals of recent decades began with the financing of parties and candidates.

Other indices—such as sharply declining membership rolls—confirm that parties have become unpopular. Yet parties remain indispensable to elective democracy. The result is an evident disconnection of the visible political actors from the electorate. Because parties operate in parliaments, the disconnection affects one of the crucial democratic institutions. People no longer think of parliaments as representing them and thus vested

with the legitimacy needed to take decisions on their behalf.

At this point, a second, quite separate, development comes into play. People are more impatient than ever. As consumers they are used to instant gratification. But as voters, they must wait before they see any results delivered by the choice they made at the ballot box. Sometimes they never see the desired results. Democracy needs time, not just for elections, but for deliberation and the exercise of checks and balances. The consumer-voter, however, will not accept this and therefore turns away.

There are alternatives, but each has its own problems as a democratic

solution. Direct action by demonstrations has become a regular and often effective occurrence. For the less mobile it can be replaced by electronic expressions of views, from Internet chat-rooms to e-mails to political leaders. Then there are non-governmental organisations, often undemocratic in their own structures and yet more closely connected, it seems, to citizens. Beyond these, of course, is the possibility of switching off altogether and leaving politics to the professionals so as to concentrate on other dimensions of life.

The latter is the most risky, because it supports the creeping authoritarianism that is a sign of our times. But the other signs of disconnection also create a highly unstable condition in which one can never tell how representative the prevailing views are. Some want to cut through the tangle with more direct democracy. But lasting connections between leaders and the governed can not be created by reducing public debate to simple referendum alternatives.

There is much to be said for holding on to the classical institutions of parliamentary democracy and trying to reconnect them with the citizenry. After all, unpopular parties and falling electoral turnout may merely be passing phenomena. New parties may arise and breathe more life into elections and representative government. But this will probably not be enough to restore the popular legitimacy that elected governments have lost. So rethinking democracy and its institutions must be a top priority for all to whom the constitution of liberty is dear. ♦

(© Project Syndicate)

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

LETTERS

PARTY TIME

Re: The editorial 'Party time' (#145). The power struggle in Nepal at present is a triangular balance between King Gyanendra, the political parties and the Maoists. Two of these forces have military might. The political parties have only the streets. The parties need to show that they are a force also to be reckoned with. A bicycle cannot stand upright without moving.

There has to be some kind of showdown, things cannot go on like this. Unfortunately, the former prime ministers and the political leadership are scared out of their wits that their past corruptions are coming back to haunt them. The street protests have nothing to do with democracy, and everything to do with protecting themselves. It is a form of blackmail to say: don't touch me, otherwise I'll do something drastic on the streets. Everyone in Nepal sees through that. The people are not dumb. Everyone has seen how these people came to Kathmandu and became billionaires overnight with those mansions and pajeros.

The Nepali people want a quick resolution to this deadlock, they want the corrupt to face the music, but they want their freedom and democracy back. And that is also the message to King Gyanendra, he must read the writing on the wall and see that time has moved on since 1990. There is no going back.

Rabindra Dhakal, Japan

• 'The great game' by Dhawal SJB Rana (#145) deserves praise for taking the middle path between the lies of the political parties and the lies from the palace. Both are dragging on this fight, waiting for the other to blink. Meanwhile, the Maoists are taking full advantage of the confusion. Even within the royal appointed cabinet there is no unity, they are all fighting each other like cats and dogs. Every minister thinks he is the king's chosen one and behaves accordingly. Rana's three-point solution (all-party interim government to oversee elections, maturity on the part of the politicians, Maoists must work towards long-term peace) is logical and sound. Anyone with common sense can see that this is what is

needed. But do we have anyone with common sense still left?

Meena Mainali, email

• I don't see why everyone involved in the present political stalemate doesn't follow the solution you present in your editorial ('Party time', #145). This dispute is totally avoidable, all we need is an agreement by all forces about what lies in the national

interest: parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. How do we get there? As you say, through an inclusive government leading us to elections and a return to democracy. The country can't take this limbo any longer.

J Pathak, Kathmandu

• I agree to a great extent with CK Lal's in-depth analysis of present political scenario of the

nation ('Reconciliation roadmap', #145). He has elaborated on the pros and cons of the government-Maoist peace talks and the so called 'people's movement 2' led by GP Koirala and supported by other political parties. Mr Lal thinks the King must trust the mainstream political parties in order for them to implement their vision for new Nepal. Fair enough. But reality is different, and the Nepali people have very little trust left in these political parties—especially the Girija and Deuba Congresses and the UML. The people have not forgotten the mischief they got up to while in power. Will the Nepalis easily forgive them? I doubt it. Just by bringing in a few thousand people, most of them cadre, relatives, or volatile unemployed youth on the streets will not reinstate the peoples' trust. GP and MK should think twice before launching the next phase of their agitation. The Nepali Congress of both factions, are especially to blame. They need

to win the hearts and minds of the people through confidence-building mechanisms. The parties need to regain the peoples' trust, otherwise even if the king reinstates them, we can't expect anything better than the past 13 years.

N Prakash, Africa

HOODWINKED

Thanks to Prakash Jwala for his vivid account in 'Ground realities' (#145) of the situation in his constituency. The Maoists are using the ceasefire to regroup, retrain and buy time for their next big offensive. Anyone who thinks otherwise is being hoodwinked. Extortion everywhere has become worse and the intimidation never stopped. Even abductions are fairly common. The Maoist cadre are forcing farmers to feed them. And now, there is proof that once again they are asking every household to give one son or daughter for the revolution. Pun should ask his counterparts what they are up to.

Hari Gurung, Pokhara

The media hype over the 50th Everest anniversary is even greater in Britain than in Nepal.



HIGH ADVENTURE

BHAGIRATH YOGI IN LONDON

News that Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay had set foot on the world's highest peak reached London on 2 June 1953, the day of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The expedition was led by Briton, John Hunt, who headed the Mount Everest Committee formed by the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club which had mounted

nine unsuccessful attempts to Mt Everest between 1921 and 1953. The *Times* newspaper which broke the story for the first time, and *The Guardian* have published special supplements in the run up to the 29 May commemorations here. The *Financial Times* and other newspapers have looked at the development of Himalayan mountaineering after 1953. The London IMAX and Science Museum are premiering the film,



RGS



AMERICAN HIMALAYAN FOUNDATION

Everest, directed by Greg MacGillivray and David Breashears. The shows are already booked till 15 June. The Royal Geographical Society and the Atlas Gallery are putting up an exhibition of the first photographs of the Mt Everest ever taken.

Then, there are several black tie events including a Royal Gala evening organised by the charity, Mount Everest Foundation with tickets priced up to £150 each. Queen Elizabeth and others are expected to attend the event at the Odeon Cinema, Leicester Square, London. Edmund Hillary was invited, but he declined, preferring to be in Nepal for the anniversary. Books are being launched and souvenirs have hit the market, including a £395 "Legacy Pen" by Shaffer with a laser-engraved inscription in Nepali.

The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) has dispatched a collection of 84 prints from its Everest Archive to Nepal for the 'Imaging Everest' exhibition at the

British Council in Kathmandu next week. Following the exhibition, the prints will be on display at the International Mountaineering Museum in Pokhara. The pictures can also be viewed at www.rgs.org/imagingeverest.

"We hope the current focus on Mount Everest will raise awareness about the shared values of mountains, both for mountain communities and also for those who have the privilege of visiting them," says Sir Ron Cooke of the Royal Geographical Society.

The RGS is using the anniversary to look at the environmental and social changes in the Himalaya in the last 50 years, and to evaluate eco-tourism success stories. Rita Gardner, a director at the RGS says she is proud that the centre's archives can be shared with the world during the anniversary. "Hopefully this will contribute to our understanding of the changes that have taken place in the last 50 years," she told us.

A seven-member BBC news



From l-r: Tenzing and Hillary back at the South Col after the summit, on the summit on 29 May 1953, Westland biplanes flew over Mt Everest in 1933.

Capt JB Noel filming on the north side of Everest in 1922 (far left), and Tenzing before the summit bid (right).

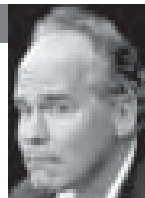


RGS

team, led by its environment and science correspondent, Tom Heap, is preparing to transmit live broadcasts from Base Camp on 29 May. A camera will be placed on Kala Pathar along with a three-mile microwave link back down the mountain to a satellite dish. National Geographic channel is re-broadcasting its documentary *Surviving Everest* on 29 May. In the film, the sons of three Everest summiteers, Peter Hillary, Jamling Norgay and Brent Bishop will commemorate their fathers' astonishing feat.

British mountaineer Stephen Venables, author of *Everest: Summit of Achievement* says there is a big fascination with Mt Everest in Britain. "I think that to some extent the interest has been whipped up by both the media and the organisers of the celebrations, and in the process, the British people are being reminded that Everest is very much a part of Britain's 20th century history," Venables told us. (See interview.)

by DANIEL LAK



Late nights in India

After to visit this fair city in the month of May. That 40 degree heat! Those power cuts! The feeling of being frazzled at the end of a long day dashing between meetings in an air-conditioned taxi driven by a pirate. All those other drivers trying to kill you. The senseless antics of many politicians.

But then, then... there's the taste of an icy cold beer as that long day wanes, there's the buzz of literary, political and journalistic conversation as the evening becomes late night. In turn, that renews your energy and you find yourself talking and arguing, laughing and listening, long past midnight, an army of empty Kingfisher bottles marching across the table.

No, I don't come to India for a buzz from drinking, or even staying up late. But I do come for the edge, the feeling of bigness and the humour that resounds around almost every question of national interest or anguish. Yes, they're learning to laugh at themselves in India and have been capable of doing so for some time. As Delhi and Islamabad start the strained semaphores of peace yet again—and we all, dutifully, wax hopeful—the old jokes are trotted out.

My favourite is in the perennial chestnut that goes like this: "Say, did you hear that India has offered Kashmir to Pakistan? No way, say it's not true. Oh yes, it is, but there's a catch, the Pakistanis have to take Bihar as well." An oldie but goodie. Where are the political jokes in Nepal at the moment? Save in the excellent cartoons in many papers, including this one.

Anyway, back to India. Everything's big there. The issues, the talk, the television chat show hairdos, the crash in software company share prices. It's nice to revel in the anonymity and comfort of people around you worrying about big things. There are also huge advances in the quality of journalism, at least in print. *Outlook* magazine, the *Indian Express*, *The Week* and *Frontline* are rigorous and principled publications that hold the country's elite and lunatic fringe to account. They are consistent in their



commitment to democracy, inclusion and transparency, their opposition to hate-mongering, corruption and cant. And they too have good cartoonists. But my point here is not to draw unfavourable comparisons between Indian and Nepali journalism. It's to ask a simple question. Why are there no Nepali reporters based in Delhi, reporting on India? The relationship between the yam and the southern boulder is crucial to both, especially to the yam. Nothing provokes more outrage in the Himalayan kingdom than being ignored, or worse, insulted by a source based in India. As we know to our cost, even forgettable film actors can set fires in the middle hills with

Why are there no Nepali reporters based in Delhi, reporting on India?

remarks they never made.

I wonder if the gap in understanding between these two lands of South Asia isn't almost total. And if so, that's ridiculous. A small first step to building a bridge over that chasm might just be the stationing of a decent correspondent—adept at Nepali, Hindi and English—here at the heart of the Indian power machine. Someone who could network and chat up the policymakers and hangers-on, catch the gossip and watch the trends. Had such a person been around in the past seven years, for example, I dare say we'd have known a few more things than we do about the Maoists and their India policy. A longer list of stories would quite obviously include the problems and concerns of the Nepali diaspora, foreign policy of course, economic debates that might affect cross border trade, India's security concerns and so on.

Even this newspaper and its sister publications, which try far more than most to understand life outside the Valley, don't get regular, incisive reportage from India. And I don't want to hear anything about costs and money, Delhi rents and so on. There is cash for good journalism in this country. There is a need for understanding what makes cross border relations as they are. Money should be no object.

I know, I know, that's easy for me to say. It's not my money. But I volunteer to forgo my fee for this column for awhile, just to see if we can't set someone up as our man/woman in New Delhi. It can only benefit the country, and I may have less money to spend on Kingfisher when I long for another late night in India. ♦

fever peaks

"My best days in the Neverest Buttress"

STEPHEN VENABLES has just published the widely-acclaimed book, *Everest: Summit of Achievement* to mark the golden jubilee of the first ascent. He spoke to *Nepali Times* in London this week.

Nepali Times: What explains the British fascination with Mt Everest?

Stephen Venables: I am not sure, actually, that the British are particularly fascinated with Everest. In fact most serious mountaineers these days are not interested in Everest, because the mountain no longer seems a place for real mountaineering. Because of an accident of colonial politics, British climbers had unique access to the mountain until 1952 and the long saga of attempts became ingrained in the British consciousness. It is good to remind people of that great epic of exploration. Also good to remind them that it was a British doctor, Alexander Kellas, who was the first European to climb with Sherpas.

How about your own climb?

I climbed the mountain in 1988. We were a four man Anglo-American team and we made the first ever ascent to the South Col from Tibet, by a new route up the Kangshung Face. From the South Col we continued up the 1953 route to the summit. We were the smallest team ever to put up such a difficult new route and we climbed without any help from high altitude porters or oxygen equipment. I reached the summit alone and was the first Briton to do so without oxygen. The "Neverest Buttress" as we called our route, gave me some of the best days of



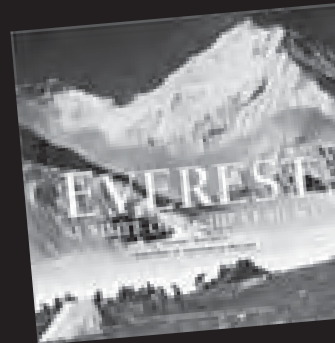
my life. We had a fantastic team, led by Robert Anderson, as well as support team, led by Sherpa Pasang Norbu from Namche. The climbing was steep, spectacular, dramatic and we had the whole east side of Everest completely to ourselves (we saw no other people for nearly two months).

So is it true what they say, that once you have been on Everest the mountain never leaves you?

Every detail of our route is firmly etched in my mind—in particular the hard rock wall which I led on 3 April 1988—my first ever day on Everest. The final summit push was the hardest thing I have ever done. We carried our own loads and made our own camps. Day Two was a 14-hour day. Day Three was an 11-hour day. On Day Four we had to wait at the South Col because of high winds. On Day Five—summit day—it took me 16½ hours to get to the top and on the way down I had to bivouac in the open at 8,600m. My companions, Ed Webster and Robert Anderson, bivouacked in an old abandoned tent lower down and I was thrilled to see them the next morning. By that stage we

were very weak and the descent of the East Face took another three days.

The descent was an epic struggle and there were a couple of moments when I thought I might not make it. The moving thing was to see how people rise above themselves on these occasions and cross barrier after barrier. Everest gave me one of the greatest experiences of my life and I feel very privileged to have been there.



DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Parents mobilise

Political parties are trying to ship up middle class support for their anti-royal move agitation by paralysing the education system. But this time, in addition to colleges they have targetted private high schools by padlocking their offices and forcing students to join political rallies. Parties mobilised their student unions to bus thousands of schools students in the capital to carry placards demanding the restoration of democracy and education on Tuesday. "Our rally is in defence of democracy," said the UML's Khim Lal Bhatrai, but party leaders evaded questions about whether the students attended voluntarily.



This show of strength was to match the Maoist students who have been going around private schools in Kathmandu forcing them to lock up their offices or face dire consequences. The principal of St Xavier's School, Fr Lawrence Maniyar, warned that his schools could not function like this and said all missionary schools in the country could be closed if the Maoists did not call off their agitation. More than 50,000 students are enrolled in missionary schools all over Nepal. In other Kathmandu schools, parents angered by the politicisation of education held meetings (see pic, above) to counter closure and protest the government's inaction.

They blame the political leadership of all parties who are interfering with the education system, by using the excuse of high fees. "Quality education costs money, why don't they protest the low quality of government schools instead of targetting schools that are doing their jobs professionally?" asked one irate member of the school organisation, PABSON.

Nepal-NZ coins

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Sagarmatha, Nepal has commissioned the New Zealand Mint to mark the event with two coins. This highly limited legal



tender issue features a 1/4oz pure gold and 1oz pure silver coin, and are the only coins endorsed by Sir Edmund Hillary, the Tenzing Norgay family and the Royal Geographical Society who funded the 1953 expedition. Featuring an obverse based on the famous image of Sir Edmund and Tenzing Norgay as they prepared for the ascent on the south face of Everest, the coins carry the name of the reigning monarch, King Gyanendra on the other side.

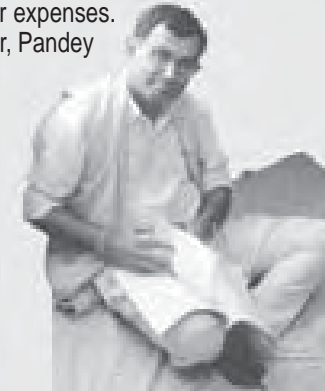
Human rights agreement

Peace activists and human rights organisations are pushing the Maoists and the government to give the current ceasefire more permanence by signing an agreement to uphold human rights. The National Human Rights Commission is said to have already discussed a draft agreement with the Maoist leadership and has received a positive response. The government side is considering the agreement. But both the government and the Maoists have

said they agree in principle to have a separate human rights agreement, since the issue is not adequately dealt with in the ceasefire guidelines. This week, the UN representative in Nepal, Henning Karcher, said such an agreement was necessary to lessen tensions during the ceasefire period.

Crime and punishment

Hari Prasad Pandey is always a step ahead of the corruption watchdog, CIAA. He decided not to wait for CIAA's verdict on his "crimes" and the self-confessed "corrupt" hydropower minister-turned-industrialist declared he would enter three years of self-imprisonment during which he will not stand for elections. His daily allowance would mirror that of Nepali jails: 700 grams of grade B rice and Rs 15 for expenses. On 23 April last year, Pandey admitted to bribing officials, evading income tax and whitewashing his past. The 56-year-old lives in Pokhara with his wife and six children, and has assigned himself a fine of Rs 15 million.



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With Love from
San Francisco Chronicle
to
Park Village
Hotel & Resort

RURAL CHARACTER OUTSIDE KATHMANDU

On a recent vacation in Nepal, I visited a peaceful new place, the Park Village Hotel and Resort. Ably managed by the same folks who run my favorite, the Kathmandu Guest House, Park Village stands at the foot of the Shivapuri Wildlife Reserve, a watershed for the Kathmandu Valley.

Built specifically to take advantage of the rural character still available just outside of busy Kathmandu, the hotel features gorgeous views, incredible bird-watching and flowering trees and shrubs that attract butterflies and dragonflies.

Not only does Park Village have lovely suites of various sizes, there are three conference rooms. While I was there a large group of doctors from Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was holding a three-day conference. They seemed very pleased as we met them on walks around the grounds and at the delicious dinner buffet.

Easy paths connect the entire area, which offers meditation areas, a lotus pond, gazebos and a beautiful new tiled swimming pool and spa. Park Village is adjacent to the splendid carved-stone Sleeping Vishnu, which is absolutely gorgeous.

Room rates are \$60-\$100 a night, which includes a full American breakfast. Good discounts are available for weekly or monthly stays. There are great views from the several balconies featured with each suite. We watched the smog-free sunset and also read on our balcony to the sound of birds. The Earthwatch Restaurant is very skilled.

11 May, 2003 NATASHA PEHRSON
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SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

by PUSKAR BHUSAL



Mind our language

From our collective scowls and snarls, it looks like the national blame game is going to continue for a while. There's one question we can no longer avoid. If each one of us is so convinced that everybody else is censurable for our plight, why is it taking so long to find a way to set things right? Probably because we're using too many hard words for soft arguments.

Take the post-October Fourth clamour. In King Gyanendra's text, justifying the dismissal of Sher Bahadur Deuba, the word "incompetence" appears twice. Both times it strictly refers to the premier's failure to conduct the general elections on the stipulated date in accordance with the constitution. In the five days it took our mainstream politicians to begin grasping the significance of the royal step, the relevance of that core reality receded. We started seeing Deuba's second innings as an emblem of ineptitude in its entirety.

There were some vital questions that should have been asked right then. Could a premier who could seal a ceasefire with the Maoists even before he formally stepped into Singha Darbar really be such a loser? Sure, Deuba bungled the peace talks. Doesn't the sense of betrayal he consistently exhibited over the next 10 months say something even if it was half real?

What led our comrades

who blocked an entire session of parliament to oust Deuba's predecessor take out a rally across Kathmandu in support of the new premier's agenda? Something much more than unmitigated relief must have gone into it. Remember what Deuba was doing when the all-party allies thundered from the Tundikhel open theatre around this time last year? Surreptitiously scheming to subvert a genuine effort to resolve the insurgency, as Girija Prasad Koirala recently suggested? Maybe. In full public view, Deuba had just fastened himself to the Bush/Blair bloc in a move the Maoists acknowledge eventually forced them to return to the negotiating table. Maybe the Belgian prime minister thinks he owes the survival of his coalition partly to his Nepali counterpart who encamped himself in Brussels to show MPs there how badly we needed those 5,500 machine guns. There still aren't easy answers now, but we should have asked those questions then.

The sweeping "incompetent" tag stuck because it served the purpose of the other seven men who signed the poll-postponement plea the premier took to the palace. Deuba's insistence that he could still hold the elections and that he signed that paper only as an overture to the other signatories hardly matters today. Regardless of its constitutionality, the restoration of Deuba's government as a rectification

We're using too many hard words for soft arguments.



of the palace's protrusion remains politically inexpedient. Deuba, too, pretends the royal indictment pertains to his entire tenure. That's probably because it's the only way he can hope to play up an overnight transformation from a Tulsī Giri to a BP Koirala.

Now that King Gyanendra's clarification has put matters in perspective, we might as well probe the linguistic intricacies that afflict the peace process. Before you wonder how the Maoists, who were all out for institutionalising our embryonic republic until October Fourth, could contemplate talking to an all-powerful palace, consider the following. An embryo is liable to a miscarriage, capable of being aborted and runs the risk of stillbirth. The Maoists have made up their mind and, at this point, it no longer matters what actually happened to that clump of cells.

Puzzled why the army is becoming politically explicit in its pronouncements these days? Ask the generals how they feel every time they hear politicians drop 'Nepali' and perpetuate the incompleteness of the Shahi Sena debate. Obviously, Kangresis and comrades couldn't have pursued their campaign to bring under civilian control a force that already has a clear popular connotation in its formal name. But, then, politicians can't be generals. Matrika Prasad Koirala hardly used the honorary military title he received. (The only truly civilian martial-law administrator I can recall is Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and look what happened to him.)

The army's admission that it has barely recovered 15 percent of the arms looted by the Maoists may reflect poorly on its search-and-recover prowess. Look at the other side of the assertion: 85 percent of the job remains to be done. Translation: the Maoists should either help out soon or prepare for the long haul without that five-kilometre perimeter. The next time Baburam Bhattarai asks us to consider the "ground realities", let's be sure to look beyond the mud slinging to make sense of the shifting sands. ♦

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Nepal Tourism Board is seeking a part time journalist with substantive qualification and experience to work in NTB's Media Center Cell. Candidates with Journalism background will have added advantage, however it is not mandatory to outstanding candidates with contributions (write up/coverage) and experience. The applicants should be fluent in written and speaking English. Knowledge and skill of writing in Nepali will deserve merit.

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ECONOMY

BIZ NEWS

FedEx grows

FedEx has completed six successful months in the kingdom. Since the beginning of October 2002, Everest De Cargo, licensee of the corporation, has offered its services in 17 locations throughout Nepal. FedEx offers services for both documents and packages to over 210 countries worldwide and significant improvements to the inbound service into Nepal. Says RM Singh, managing director of Everest De Cargo, "We aim to provide customers in Nepal high quality, international, express transportation services."



Winner's delight

Dharmaraj Raj Pant won the first Philips Home Theatre system in Coca-Cola's Music Masti promotion launched a month ago by Bottler's Nepal. The Butwal resident struck the jackpot when the cap of his bottle revealed his gift. There are still four home theatres, 50 music systems and 500 cassette recorders still waiting to be won. The promotion will continue till 15 June.

Insurers issued code

The government has come up with new rules for the insurance sector. The amendments to the Insurance Regulation now authorise the Insurance Board (IB) to issue a code of conduct for agents. It makes training and orientation a prerequisite and allows an agent only a single affiliation with a life insurer, but allows for another affiliation for general insurance. The surveyors will also be bound by the new amendments. The IB is empowered to issue directives to surveyors in definitive terms on the scope and limitation of their jobs. Till now they could be appointed to assess losses in all sorts of damages. An aspirant now needs to have at least a bachelors' degree in either engineering, accounting or insurance to obtain the licence of a surveyor. It is hoped that this move will standardise qualifications, enhance surveyors' credibility and reduce dependency on foreign surveyors.

Duopoly?

Ever wonder what those new telecom towers are doing on top of tall buildings in Kathmandu? Within a month there will be a new player in the field of basic telephone communications. Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) finally put an end to government monopoly by making way for the first private operator of Wireless in Local Loop (WLL). The tariff plan submitted by United Telecom Limited (UTL), a Nepal-India joint venture, has already been approved by the NTA. It is similar to the existing tariff plan of Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC), with the exception that UTL is not required to subscribe to local telephony. The monthly minimum rental charge is fixed at Rs200 that covers 175 calls. The call charges for long distance domestic and international calls are the same. The connection charge has been fixed at Rs 2000, with an additional Rs 2,000 and Rs 3,000 for domestic and international long distance calls respectively.

Marvelous marmelous

The new way to beat the heat is with Alternative Herbal Industries' marmelous juice. It comes in 650ml bottles priced at Rs 95. The manufacturers say that by drinking Marmelous you help not only yourself but others as well: the juice helps prevent constipation, diabetes, urine and digestive problems and is sourced from community-managed forests.



Snack bite

McBili Shorā Sūk āre lōw tāt, bākēd nōt trīed and free from preservatives. This healthy snack comes in a wide variety of tempting flavours—red onion, cheese, wasabi, barbecue, chili cream and exotic pizza. Foodline, a Kathmandu-based company, is importing these Thai treats. Priced at Rs 110-120 for a 145gm packet, they are available throughout the kingdom.



INTERVIEW

"We have not over-commercialised our mountains."



MIN BARACHARYA

The president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, Ang Tshering Sherpa is busy ironing out the final details for the Everest Golden Jubilee celebrations. A seasoned tourism veteran, he spoke to *Nepali Times* about mountain ecology, high-altitude dumping and over-commercialisation.

Nepali Times: How are preparations for the 50th anniversary shaping up?

Ang Tshering Sherpa: We are working on a sort of war footing, giving it our very best. More than 200 foreign and over 100 Nepali sumiteers have confirmed their participation. One of the prime attractions of this program is the historic gathering of Everest sumiteers in Kathmandu on 29 May. The world's eyes will be on Nepal.

Why in Kathmandu and not at Everest Base Camp?

The base camp would be ideal but we face practical problems like accommodation and transportation. Handling so many guests in such a remote area is very difficult to manage.

How badly has SARS impacted the celebration plans?

Well, the virus has not dampened our spirits. We can already see signs of the epidemic tapering off. In Singapore, for instance, the disease has been brought under control. By the time our program starts, we hope things will look to have taken an upward turn. Till date only a few climbers, mostly from Southeast Asia, expressed doubts about being here for the anniversary.

The question will come up: have we turned the Himalaya into a commodity?

I disagree with anyone who says we have over-commercialised our mountains. Mountaineers with different capabilities come to Nepal because we can offer them a variety of different climbs—from easy to difficult, high to low. Some sell mountain sports as a tourist product, but not everyone operates on those lines. Eco-tourism is not just a buzzword for us.

And garbage? We cleaned up Everest, rubbish is piling up on Dhaulagiri and Annapurna base camps.

The NMA has received complaints about litter on Dhaulagiri and Manasalu base camps. We have plans to clean up those areas in the near future. We must put a system into place, similar to the ones they have in Europe. So many mountaineers go to the Alps every year and yet their mountains are so clean because they have an orderly process that everyone follows. In our own case, the Khumbu region is much cleaner than it was 15 years ago. The most important factor is education—for the local people, the expedition team members and even the staff and porters.

STRICTLY BUSINESS

by ASHUTOSH TIWARI



Legend as brand



How do you make a Nepali angry? Easy, just blurt out that Mt Everest is in China or, worse still, in India and watch your listener explode. If you are lucky, you'll get away with a lecture on the geography of the Himalaya and a warning never to repeat the faux pas.

Indeed, with the possible exception of the canard that the Buddha was born in India, few other half-truths inspire Nepalis. Thanks in part to 50 years of relentless state-led publicity campaigns through school textbooks, Radio Nepal, *Gorkhapatra*, public speeches and annual rituals, Everest evokes intense loyalty among Nepalis—something that businesses everywhere try to create and nurture among their consumers through expensive branding exercises. It doesn't take a great leap to make the connection: Everest has been co-opted for the business of buying and selling. Businesses undoubtedly hope the magic of association, some of what Everest stands for in the public imagination—purity, solidity, stability, reliability and even prestige—will rub off on their goods and services.

Kathmandu's New Banewar probably has the highest concentration of Everest branding. Everest Bank (signifying stability?) stands right next to Everest Nursing Home (reliability?), across which is the Everest Hotel (solidity, and not icy service?), who in turn, gets a share of its clients from, among others, Everest Expeditions and Tours (prestige?). The Valley is dotted with Everest Momos, Everest Bakery Cafés, Everest Handicrafts and Everest Nets. In fact, there are so many variously shaped and sized Everest named goods and services that it is surprising that no Nepali chow-chow mogul has come up with Everest Noodles.

With its rather insipid slogan "Mt Everest & More", Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) seems determined to attract more tourists. But as its own data shows, between 1999-2001 twice as many visitors—73,377 to be precise—came to Nepal for "holiday and pleasure" than for mountaineering and trekking, which attracted only 33,000 thousand tourists. Amidst the Everest celebrations this week, it's worth asking whether NTB has done a good job marketing our mountains or whether most visitors to Nepal, contrary to popular belief, actually prefer to do something else other than climb or visit mountains.

It's not only homegrown businesses that are enamoured with Everest. Foreign business school professors too have succumbed to the gritty charms of logistical and emotional challenges that the world's

Cashing in on Everest.

Earlier, in the Fall 1998 edition of *Wharton Alumni Magazine*, Useem described how another trek across the Everest region was helpful for his students to come up with innovative business ideas. Likewise, in a number of management schools, that recent bestseller, *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster* by Jon Krakauer, has apparently become required reading, with appropriate lessons distilled for applications in corporate settings. Given how Everest has become an inspiration for business practices worldwide, one wonders when the Human Resource Department of our own FNCCI will organise an Everest trek to instill leadership among its members, the captains of our commerce and industry. ♦

What are the plans for more grisly things like cadavers on the slopes?

Last year an expedition group brought down two bodies. The cadavers are really unnerving for many climbers, but you must realise that it is not an easy job to remove them from the mountains. They are frozen stone cold and are very heavy, making it very difficult for anyone to carry them to lower altitudes where they can be buried or cremated.

How do we reduce pressure on mountain forests?

Micro hydro-electricity projects have helped lessen the impact. Many turbines have reached the mountain areas thanks to the Mi17 helicopters. These have reduced the rate of deforestation. The locals are being helped by various NGOs and INGOs who teach them how to properly manage and utilise their resources. There definitely is a positive side to mountain tourism.

Lot of complaints about our bureaucracy, and expeditions call our liaison officers ilaziy officers. What is NMA doing about it?

This is a complaint we receive regularly, especially from international alpine associations who bring the subject up at different forums. We have spoken about this with the government who is finally taking the matter seriously. A more practical solution to the problem would be appointing a liaison officer for every mountain open to expeditions. It seems a waste to appoint one liaison officer for each expedition team. After all, most of them do not accompany the team and yet bill the expeditioners.

How about the welfare of support staff on the expedition?

This is an important concern for the NMA because we believe without making our staff and porters happy, we cannot make our clients happy. The staff are responsible for the well-being of the clients throughout their trip, so it's necessary that they too are taken care of. The NMA also pays for the education of all our staff members' children.

Like everything else in Nepal, NMA has also split. Can you tell us more?

Till date, the NMA is the only national mountaineering association in Nepal. For the last 30 years it has worked for the betterment of mountain tourism in Nepal. Yes, we are aware of the other federation, but the government has not recognised it so far.

Teaming up

OTTAWA — A new North American agency will provide shock troops for the fight against new viruses like SARS and West Nile, health officials say. Paul Gully, head of the Canadian health department's contagious disease department, says the Canada-US agency will be uniquely able to provide "surge capacity"—a large pool of experts trained in handling epidemics who can be quickly mobilised when a crisis like SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) erupts.

During April's SARS outbreak in Toronto, Canadian health workers and epidemiologists found they could not keep up with the disease. One of the city's top experts on viral infections caught SARS and was hospitalised for a month, and federal officials had to ask for help from the US Centres for Disease Control (CDC). At the same time, Canadian officials were outraged when the World Health Organisation issued a travel advisory for the city. It was lifted five days later, but the tourism industry in the country's largest city suffered a 40 percent loss and has shown few signs of rebounding prior to the usually peak summer season. The Conference Board of Canada, a national economic forecaster, estimated the outbreak of SARS will cost Toronto \$720 million. (IPS)

GE row

BRUSSELS — The European Commission has condemned the US decision to file a complaint with the World Trade Organisation against the European Union's de facto ban on genetically modified foods. The US considers the current European Union (EU) moratorium on the commercial development of genetically modified (GM) foods as an "illegal" barrier under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules.

Senior officials of the 15-nation EU's executive arm, the European Commission, dismiss the US Administration's move as "legally unwarranted", "economically unfounded" and "politically unhelpful". The US, along with twelve other agricultural exporting nations, including Argentina, Canada and Egypt, want the EU to repeal its five-year moratorium on GM foods, or face sanctions under WTO rules.

Statements by senior officials in Brussels however indicated that EU is unlikely to lift the block on GM foods, which is widely supported by European consumers. EU consumer and green lobby groups have opposed the US claim, saying it goes against the wishes of the majority of consumers in Europe. Under the EU system, the prospective effects of GMOs on human, animal and plant health and the environment have to be scientifically assessed before being approved for marketing. (IPS)

Fine tuning

BRUSSELS — The new constitution for the European Union, which is currently being drawn up, must not compromise humanitarian aid and development policy, say civil society groups. They fear that the development policy of the 15-nation European Union (EU), which provides aid to developing countries across the world, would become increasingly dwarfed by its external relations agenda, especially foreign, trade, immigration and security policies.

Members of several NGOs, led by BOND, the British Overseas NGO for Development are expressing this anxiety. A network of 270 NGOs, BOND is concerned over the EU's external role and stressed the need to make institutional changes in order to ensure that the Union is more inclusive and accountable to the world's poor. The Convention on the Future of Europe, a group of representatives from each member state under the former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, are currently preparing proposals for a new constitution for Europe to respond to the changing needs of a growing and evolving EU. The European Commission, represented by Barbara Brandtner, said humanitarian assistance under ECHO, the EU's humanitarian aid office, should remain separate. (IPS)

Slamming doors

HAVANA — Cuba has once again withdrawn its request to join the Cotonou Agreement, through which the European Union extends aid and preferential trading conditions to former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP).

Cuba's decision reflects the tensions that currently mark its ties with the EU, which has loudly criticised the stiff prison sentences handed down in Havana to 70 dissidents in April and the execution of three men who hijacked a passenger ferry. In January, Havana had filed its second request to join the pact, under which the EU established a \$15.6 billion fund to finance development programs in 77 former ACP colonies between 2003 and 2008. By cancelling its application, the Cuban government responded to a decision adopted on 30 April by the European Commission, the bloc's executive organ, which indefinitely suspended consideration of Cuba's request due to human rights concerns.

Membership in the Cotonou Agreement would have led to a tripling of EU aid to Cuba. Cuba is annoyed by the six-monthly EU evaluations. In December the EU had announced it would carry them out once a year but after the April executions it decided to continue with the twice-yearly evaluation process. (IPS)

Saddam and the Arabs

AWAD NASIR in LONDON

With the end of Saddam Hussein's regime, the scope of his brutalisation of Iraqi people is becoming clear. Mass graves are unearthed, torture chambers opened. Countless Iraqis now openly recount horrifying stories of the murder and disappearance of loved ones.

In the other Arab states, the political leadership and the media have not dwelled much on these aspects of Saddam's rule. They have good reason for avoiding such close scrutiny. Many of them benefited directly from Saddam's rule. Examining what he did in Iraq means examining their own role in supporting more than three decades of brutality.

The heyday of Saddam's relations with the Arab world came during the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s. Saddam's attack on Iran allayed the fears of Arab regimes that Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran would export its Islamic revolution. The late Jordanian monarch King Hussein would join Saddam in inspecting the frontlines. The Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, offered Saddam massive financial and media support.

Egypt's centres of power, such as its army, businessmen, journalists, and ideological parties, played a prominent role in supporting Saddam's war against Iran. Syria was the sole exception to this chorus of Arab approval for Saddam, because its late leader, President Hafez al Assad, had

aligned himself with Iran.

Saddam's brutality within Iraq also served his neighbors' purposes. He repressed the Shiites, the traditional opponents of Sunni-dominated regimes in the region. He suppressed the Kurds, reassuring both Turkey and Syria, countries with sizeable—and restive—minority populations of their own. Indeed, by stifling any hint of democracy or political opposition in Iraq, Saddam's police state eliminated all risk of possible contagion of neighbouring states.

Outside Iraq, Saddam understood the uses of wealth and influence as a means of gaining friends. He put his oil reserves to good use, providing Jordan and Syria—each a failing economy—with deeply discounted supplies, assuring their goodwill.

Saddam also focussed his attention on the media in the Arab world, understanding their power in controlling and regimenting an audience. Saddam spent unreservedly, buying off politicians, journalists, writers, and artists in Iraq, the Arab world, and beyond. Through a large and interlocking network of security and media organisations, Saddam financed scores of newspapers and magazines, lavishing on their hack writers sums of money that were unimaginable to ordinary Arab journalists.

A political-intelligence-media network was constantly at work. Arab writers and artists invited to Saddam-sponsored cultural events would invariably find a pleasant

How will the Arab world react to Iraq's reckoning, and how will it face its own complicity in Saddam's legacy?



surprise when opening brief cases distributed as presents—wads of dollars would be stuffed inside. For favoured supporters, the rewards could be much greater: mansions, luxurious apartments, the latest cars.

Dozens of Arab intellectuals engaged in this kind of business with Saddam. In the Arab world many of these people are literary celebrities, film idols and media stars. Recently discovered documents reveal that hundreds of them received money and gifts from Saddam or his henchmen.

At the center of this network were the cultural organisations that Saddam established in Arab and other capitals. Iraqi embassies acted as media centers, along with their despicable role in hunting dissidents of all political stripes. The sole concern of these lavishly-funded front organisations was to sell Saddam Hussein abroad and discredit his opponents.

I experienced directly the difficulty of trying to offer an alternative view of Iraq and its cultural life. With a group of

colleagues, I established a modest cultural group, with no external support whatsoever. We had a terrible time trying to publish our writings or getting coverage of the society's activities. I remember how much we agonised before we could print our first literary review, *Al-Badeel* (The Alternative), early years in our forced exile more than twenty years ago, starting in Lebanon.

In the Arab region, Saddam manipulated people's sentiments by feeding them an ever-changing diet of secular, Islamist, and nationalist slogans. He crowned these with his call to liberate Palestine "from the river to the sea," that is, the destruction of Israel, outdoing the Palestinian leaders themselves. Indeed, it was Saddam who added the words "God is great" in his own handwriting to the Iraqi flag.

Saddam also assigned his deputy Izzat Ibrahim to lead a so-called "faith drive". The campaign was designed to serve several purposes, including the suppression of any free, secular thinking. On a wider scale, it was meant to influence and win over Arab and Muslim minds by hollow but bombastic rhetoric. Unfortunately, many Arabs, rulers and ruled alike, fell for it.

With the end of Saddam's regime, Iraq faces a reckoning for decades of physical brutality and cultural intimidation. Iraqis will have to revisit concepts—like nationalism, sovereignty and Islamic community—that have never come under critical examination. How the Arab world reacts to Iraq's reckoning, and whether other Arabs will face their own complicity in Saddam's legacy, will tell us a great deal about what sort of Arab societies the future will bring. ♦

(Awad Nasir is an Iraqi poet still exiled in London, where he works as a writer and editor.)

COMMENT

by MUSAHAID HUSSAIN

Insecurity on the rise

ISLAMABAD — Just more than a week ago, US President George W Bush was triumphantly telling audiences in the United States that "the back of al-Qaeda is broken and we are winning the war on terror".

But the orchestration in the 12 May attacks in Saudi Arabia seems to have taken both the United States and Saudi Arabia by surprise. Then on Friday night, five suicide bomb attacks hit Morocco's commercial capital of Casablanca, in a move that US officials and other officials suspect could also be the work of al-Qaeda.

These come when US policy had shifted to diplomacy in the aftermath of the Iraq war. At the time of the Riyadh blasts (see pic), US Secretary of State Colin Powell was visiting the region. Quiet talks with Iran have apparently resulted in allowing the prominent Tehran-based Iraqi cleric, Ayatollah Baqer al Hakimi, to return to Iraq, as well as the disarmament of the Iraq-based, anti-Iran Mujahideen-e-Khalq Organisation.

What is Iran's quid for the American quo remains to be seen, but it will probably be evident in the Iranian moderating the Hizbollah in Lebanon, especially their military campaign against Israel. It is no accident that Iranian President Mohammad Khatami visited Lebanon, where Hizbollah has its headquarters. But despite the shift to diplomacy the Middle East and the world at large are going to be a more volatile place.

What do the blasts foretell about the Middle East? First, the Iraq war had nothing to do with the "war on terror" or the quest for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. For many in the Muslim world, it was about oil, Israel and reshaping the Middle East political map, hence, terrorism remains a potent

threat, as Riyadh has so brutally demonstrated. Second, US interests are threatened not by Muslim regimes or rulers, who can either be contained, coopted or crushed—as happened with Saddam Hussein or the Taliban or even Yasser Arafat, who has been sidelined through his newly appointed Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas.

The United States faces a new kind of enemy nameless, faceless, stateless with the skill, will and motivation to strike through a weapon that has no remedy in its arsenal, namely, suicide bombing. It is the suicide bomber who has the capacity to destabilise in a massive manner, as Riyadh, Palestine or Chechnya have demonstrated. Following US media reports that Osama bin Laden had masterminded the Riyadh terror strikes, these could indicate an unusually high level of sophistication and organisation. Third, now that Saudi Arabia is no longer the lynchpin in US Middle East strategy, the United States may need to review its strategy. Iraq and Afghanistan remain volatile. Palestine is unsettled. Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, are nervous over US designs which to them seem to be Israel-driven.

This is all happening as Bush faces an upcoming presidential election next year, one he intends to fight on the flag of patriotism imposed on the sands and deserts of the Middle East while protecting, and promoting Israel, much to the chagrin of Middle Eastern governments and people. This dichotomy is widening the cleavage between popular perceptions in the Middle East and US official policy there. Riyadh would have widened that yawning chasm. ♦ (IPS)

(Mushahid Hussain is a Pakistani senator and former information minister of the Nawaz Sharif cabinet.)



The world faces a new kind of enemy—nameless, faceless, stateless suicide bombers.

The metaphor of blight

Exaggerated, capricious, unfair and unjustified as they may be, metaphors are difficult to bottle back up once they have been invoked.

spread that characterises influenza seems not to be occurring with SARS—thank heavens for that.

Meanwhile, the metaphors—exaggerated, capricious, unfair and unjustified as they may be—are difficult to bottle back up once they have been invoked. When the World Health Organisation issued travel advisories for the affected countries, the SARS metaphor now came to mean economic blight. Singapore, China and Hong Kong saw trade and tourism shrivel away (and it was not as if these economies were doing that well before SARS). At a time when international bodies such as the UN are divided and ineffective, the WHO has never seemed more virile and potent. Indeed, it was a WHO physician, Dr Carlo Urbani, who first identified the new outbreak and tragically became a martyr to the illness, one of many doctors to succumb to the disease.

The warning against travel to the Far East was accepted as prudent by most in the West, a rough pill that those countries would have to swallow. But when Toronto was added to the

WHO list, there were howls of protest from that city as they objected to the metaphor of blight. A delegation from Toronto flew to Geneva to make the case that they had controlled the infection, and a surprisingly pliant WHO agreed to take them off the list. It turned out that new cases were popping up in Toronto even as their officials were flying to Geneva. Canadian officials claimed they did not know about the new cases when they made their pitch in Geneva. Embarrassed WHO officials seemed ready to reimpose the recommendation against travel, sensing that a double standard had been revealed. But in any case, the damage to Toronto was done and would take time to be reversed, no matter what the WHO or the city fathers now said.

America thus far has been most fortunate and has largely been spared the disease. More important from an economic point of view, it has been spared the metaphor. The Centers for Disease Control and regional public-health entities have done a great job of tracking potentially infected persons and isolating them, and also of raising

awareness in the health-care settings most likely to see patients. Dr Julie Gerbending of the CDC has been a much more reassuring figure than Tommy Thompson. But let's not kid ourselves: America has also been incredibly lucky to be spared the virus and the metaphor.

America still has much to be concerned about. There are aspects of SARS we don't understand. For example, SARS, more than any disease I can recall, amplifies itself dramatically in some health-care settings. At the Prince of Wales Hospital in Hong Kong, 138 health-care workers came down with SARS contracted from one patient. Similarly in Toronto, almost all the patients were traced to one hospitalised patient. Indeed, it is almost as if the virus uses a patient as its Trojan horse to get entry into the hospital, as if the hospital were its primary target.

And hospitals are not the only institutions we must worry about; one hotel, the Metropole in Hong Kong,

had a single infected guest—a doctor, who later died—who somehow spread it to other guests who in turn carried the disease to several other countries. And then there is the story of the incredible spread of SARS within an apartment building in Hong Kong, where ultimately 286 people came down with the disease. All it will take to cause an outbreak in an American city is one patient, a superspreader, whose illness is not immediately recognised, and then we will find what it is like to be tainted by the metaphor.

SARS has exposed the inequities and imbalances between the health systems of various countries—disorganised and secretive in China, well organised and accessible in the US. It has suggested how phenomenally important the element of luck is in a country's experience. And the metaphors SARS invokes reflect our biases and our prejudices; the disease reveals the cultural stereotypes hiding just below the surface. The virus, like so many before it, is democratic: It reminds us that we share one planet, and that even if we do not share the planet's wealth, we share its misfortunes. ♦ (@ TAWSJ)

(Abraham Verghese, MD, is the director of the Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics, University of Texas Health Sciences Centre, San Antonio. His most recent book is *The Tennis Partner*.)

People police

TOKYO — Under the Information Disclosure Law that came into effect in April 2001, a citizen can file a request for classified information from government agencies, local governments, national hospitals and other public institutions. It took a 20-year struggle and intense lobbying by activists, academics and consumer organisations to get the law framed and passed. Now, at the top of the agenda among the civic-minded is the misuse of tax revenue.

Emboldened by the law, Japanese activists are now demanding information on a number of subjects. A survey conducted in 2002 showed that the number of requests for disclosures reached 30,000 that year, and the bulk of these were filed with the National Tax Agency. They are even tackling the highly sensitive issue of child rights by asking that the law cover the right to inform adopted children about their biological parents, which is also related to the increasing number of births through infertility treatments. Tax misappropriation, school funds, nuclear waste and public health are all issues close to the citizens' hearts now benefiting from the new law. The next step, activists say, is to ensure the participation of the public before a law or budget is passed, rather than demanding information retrospectively. (IPS)

Line of fire

CANBERRA — Australian Prime Minister John Howard has refused to dismiss the governor general, Dr Peter Hollingworth, over adverse findings by an Anglican church inquiry into the sexual abuse of students by priests while he was head of the diocese of Brisbane. Instead, Howard has negotiated that Hollingworth temporarily step aside while the fate of an unrelated legal case is determined.

The Victorian Supreme Court must resolve whether a case brought by Annie Jamryn can proceed. Jamryn alleged Hollingworth raped her in 1965 or 1966 in a camp organised by a church-based youth. Hollingworth strenuously rejects the accusations and has prepared a detailed rebuttal, including an emotional televised address to the nation last week. Another report tabled by premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie, was critical of Hollingworth's handling of two of nine complaints of child sexual abuse. The report revealed that although Hollingworth knew that the Reverend John Elliot had repeatedly abused a boy between 1978 and 1981, he was allowed to continue in the ministry with restrictions.

In June 2001 Howard appointed Hollingworth as the governor general, a largely ceremonial head of state representing the British queen but with significant 'reserve' powers under the constitution. (IPS)

Relapse into war

JAKARTA — After five months, the ceasefire between the government of President Megawati Sukarnoputri and the Free Aceh Movement, known by its Indonesian acronym GAM, collapsed following Jakarta's imposition of a state of emergency in Aceh starting Monday. A last-ditch round of talks in Tokyo also ended over the weekend, with already ominous signs. The military prevented Aceh-based members of the GAM negotiating team to fly to Japan, and they had to take part in the discussions by cellular phones.

The province was put under special military operations for 10 years under Suharto, from 1987.

Onwards and at least 10,000 people have been killed in the conflict. The state of emergency will last six months and can be extended. Calls for military action had increased because the peace process had not yielded results and clashes had started again between the military and GAM.

Early this month, Jakarta deployed large numbers of troops to the province after Megawati asked the military to prepare for a crackdown. Altogether, security forces in Aceh now number almost 50,000. Last week, parliament also voted for a \$147 million budget to finance a military-led campaign in Aceh. (IPS)

World player

BEIJING — China is making its first appearance at the meeting of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialised nations in June, a sign of a shift in its foreign policy from being a revolutionary power to a major world player. Three years ago, it rejected an invitation from Germany to attend the G-8 annual summit as an observer, maintaining its communist stance that the group is a "club of the rich".

China's need to repair the international damage caused by its initial mishandling of the SARS outbreak provides the immediate background for President Hu Jintao's (pic, below) meeting with the leaders of G-8 countries. In November 2002 China signed an agreement that would create a free trade zone by 2010 with the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Beijing has also abandoned its once-virulent anti-US rhetoric. Analysts say the example of Russia, which evolved toward greater participation in the G-8, has given China a good deal of enlightenment on how to gradually transform its image as a communist country with isolationist policies.

Hu Jintao's attendance at the G-8 meeting marks his first official appearance at a world forum since he was anointed Communist Party leader in October and state president in March. (IPS)



Trekking fee

Rajendra Manandhar in Kantipur, 16 May

राजेंद्र मानन्धर

Austrian tourists Arien Cosac and Sabina have a souvenir from the Maoists. It is a permit letter allowing them to trek Rolwaling area and it reads: "The eastern regional command of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) thank you for the Rs 1,000 you provided to help the people's war." The Austrians are

not the first to be asked for 'donations'. More than half-a-dozen different trekking groups in Rolwaling have been forced to pay money for the cause. An American-Italian group came back from their trek Rs 12,000 lighter, an Australian team reportedly paid Rs 11,000 to continue with their trek and Belgian trekkers returned to the capital with a receipt for Rs 4,000. The rebels call it an "entry permit fee". Tourists who arrive in Dolakha are asked to pay between Rs 1,000-3,000 each for the

privilege of trekking in this scenic valley. District secretary of the CPN (Maoist), Asmita admitted those who refuse to pay are asked to leave, but added: "We only ask them to pay voluntarily." Asmita said the 'fee' did not violate the code of conduct signed between the government and Maoists earlier this year and that all donations would be put to good use for the development of Rolwaling. Locals estimate the Maoists have collected more than Rs100,000 this spring. Many trekkers feel cheated.

"Illogical deadlock"

An interview with Bishwo Nath Upadhaya, president of the 1991 constitution drafting commission. In *Sanghu*, 19 May

बिष्णुनाथ

Do you agree that the king's October Fourth move was unconstitutional?

The present deadlock is illogical. It was an unconstitutional move—there are constitutional alternatives to what he did. If the prime minister's recommendation was improper, the king could have sent it back to the cabinet for reconsideration. Or he could have directed the prime minister towards an election, after all both the Election Commission and the security forces had declared their preparedness. The king's action was against all constitutional options on offer.

So is the constitution still relevant?

The king's move has no provision under the constitution. What we have now is a government put in place in direct contravention of the constitution. In this regard, I would have to admit the constitution is no longer active in the sense we intended. Modern world history shows that the parliament can be reinstated. In our case, the body mandated by the people for a five-year period was faultily dissolved. Only article 127 is active, in it is a proviso that allows for the reinstatement of the parliament.

Is there a way out, then?

There is no way out other than reinstating parliament. This will automatically revive all other constitutional processes. The parliament can then decide whether it wants to form a single party government and hold talks with the Maoists. The present situation arose because of the Maoist insurgency, undemocratic competition among the political parties, and the ambition of the monarch. We failed to set a system and have experimented between a democracy and guided democracy since 1950. The political parties misused power, and the king could not establish himself as a



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constitutional entity. It is rather ironical that the monarch always chose extra-constitutional paths whenever such a situation presented itself.

At present, which is the most powerful of the three factions?

The king has the army behind him, the government has only the right to rule. Therefore, I would suggest neutralisation of the army. Neither the monarch nor the political parties should be allowed to interfere. The government should be allowed to take decisions regarding the army through due process only for national emergencies like foreign aggression, extraordinary external situations and for the welfare of the general public. The experiences of other countries suggest this will bring political stability.

What were the major mistakes in the past 12 years?

The political parties got themselves embroiled in undemocratic competition, they horse-traded and amassed wealth, setting the stage for the king to step in with his unconstitutional solution. The palace is a guardian of this country—it has the right to take precautions against wrong-doings. But it cashed in on the confusion created by unhealthy politics. The mishandling resulted in the palace usurping even the prerogative of the government to assign political appointments.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

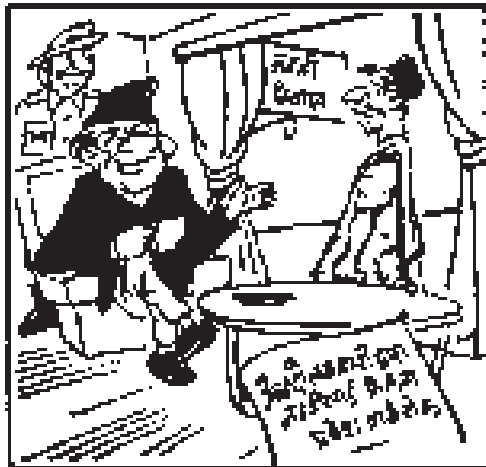
Our political parties failed to perform in the last 12 years. We must start from zero again to win the people's trust. We acted irresponsibly.

-Shailaja Acharya of the Nepali Congress in *Rajdhani*, 21 May.



No, it isn't what I thought... This isn't the queue for Korean jobs, these people have been summoned by the CIAA!

गोरखापत्र Gorkhapatra, 19 May



Newspaper: Ministers stopped from visiting violent districts. Minister: "What bad luck! I was prevented from coming just when I was ready to visit your district with a development package." *Spacetime*, 22 May

Insurgency timeline

हिमाल

Kiran Nepal in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 May

1996

13 February: Maoists attack police posts in Rukum, Holeri and Sindhuligadhi. 29 February-19 March: Police operation in Rukum and Rolpa. 17 July: Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Human Rights of House of Representatives appeal for the creation of a conducive environment for talks to stop violence.

1997

3 January: Maoists attack Bethan police post in Ramechhap. 11 March: UML-Sadhabana-RPP coalition government presided over by Lokendra Bahadur Chand constitutes a taskforce led by Prem Singh Dhimi to find a solution to the Maoist problem. The taskforce labels it "terrorist activity in a political disguise". 7 October: A Nepali Congress-RPP-Sadhabana coalition government formed under the leadership of Surya Bahadur Thapa.

1998

8 January: Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa recommends dissolution of House of Representative. 5 March: The UML splits. 12 April: Girija Prasad Koirala constitutes a Nepali Congress minority government. 26 May: The police launches counter-insurgency Operation Kilo Sierra II. 11 June: US ambassador Ralph Frank warns of withdrawal of international aid if Maoist attacks on development infrastructure continue. 8 September: Alternative politburo member Suresh Wagle and Commander Bhimsen Pokharel killed in police encounter. 27 November: Maoists declare new campaign to create 'base areas'. 15 December: Minister Chiranjibi Wagle's house in Chabel bombed.

1999

2 January: Bhatte Danda police post in Lalitpur attacked. 15 January: Maoists kill Hari Bhakta Oli, ex-DDC chairman and president of Rukum Nepali Congress. 5 March: Maoists kill Yadi Gautam, UML secretary of Rukum and candidate for general elections. 31 May: Nepali Congress majority government formed under Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. 14 June: Maoists attack police post in Laha, Rukum. 30 December: Taskforce led by Sher Bahadur Deuba formed to study the Maoist problem and offer resolution.

2000

7 June: Maoists attack Panchkatiya police post in Jajarkot.

2001

4 February: Maoists attack Chief Justice Keshab Prasad Upadhaya in Surkhet. 1 April: Maoists attack Rukumkot police post. 6 April: Maoists attack Naumule police post, Dolakha. 11 April: Integrated Security and Development Program (ISDP) launched in Maoist affected districts. 1 June: Royal palace massacre. 7 July: Maoists attack police posts in Taruka of Nuwakot, Bichaur of Lamjung and Bami of Gulmi. 12 July: Holleri attack. 19 July: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala resigns. 21 July: Sher Bahadur Deuba proposes peace talks. 22 July: The Maoists attack Pandusen police post in Bajura. 25 July: Government-Maoist ceasefire declared. 30 August: First round of talks held in Godavari. 13-14 September: Second round of talks held in Bardiya. 13 November: Third round of talks in Godavari. 21 November: Prachanda declares end of the ceasefire. 23 November: Maoists announce Central People's Government under Baburam Bhattarai. Simultaneous attacks on army in Dang, and district headquarters. 25 November: Attack on Salleri in Solukhumbu. 26 November: State of emergency declared, the Maoists labelled terrorists and the Royal Nepali Army is deployed.

2002

21 February: Parliament endorses state of emergency. 23 April: Ransom on heads of Maoist leaders. 7 May: US President George W Bush backs government campaign against the Maoists and pledges support, Maoists attack army camp in Gam. 17 May: Parliament extends state of emergency. 22 May: Parliament dissolved on recommendation of Prime Minister, election date set for 3 November. 26 May 2002: Deuba expelled from Nepali Congress. 18 June: The Deuba faction expels party president Girija Prasad Koirala. 8 September: Maoists attack Sandhikharka in Arghakhachi, most government buildings destroyed. 3 October: Prime Minister Deuba recommends elections be postponed for a year. 4 October: King Gyanendra sacks Deuba and takes over executive powers. 11 October: Formation of a new cabinet under the premiership of Lokendra Bahadur Chand. 14 October: Maoists attack and destroy Jumla district headquarters. 26 January: Maoists assassinate Chief of Armed Police Krishna Mohan Shrestha, his wife Nudup Shrestha and bodyguard in Kathmandu. 28 January: Government decides to retract terrorist label, bounties and the red corner notice against the Maoists. 29 January: Government-Maoist ceasefire declared. 12 March: The Nepali Congress, the UML, People's Front and NMKP (Nepal Workers and Peasants Party) reach a consensus for a joint agitation against the October Fourth royal move. 28 March: Maoist negotiation team comes out in the open at a press conference. 8 April: Student leader killed in Butwal demonstration. 27 April: First round of government-Maoist peace talks at Shanker Hotel. 10 May: Second round of government-Maoist negotiations end with an agreement restricting army movement.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

NEPALITERATURE

Ramesh Tufan A voice for liberation

CITY

Humanity is lost in a thicket of human beings Let us not try seeking it out for the ambushing beast sprung from the mind of man has long ago devoured it

One cannot say 'Death to this era'

Like the ornate letters spelling words of welcome before passengers at the airports and at the border gates the city stretches across the way an aged ravenous tiger

The city knows how to entice people and how to suck them dry leaving skeletal remains Like the aged tiger dissentors too here roar to satisfy their own greed Like dogs in the season of heat desires here rove desperately having been robbed by the newly arrived travellers of compassion

Neither can one embrace this era

The city is no civility Nor is it any culture If you can loot If you can't have others loot for you The city is a beast in ambush The city is an aged ravenous tiger The city is a dog in the season of heat

empty icons and killed off old forms in order to demand of the times the liberation that Nepalis deserve. Ramesh Tufan's poems, translated below, give us a sense of what our writers today have been saying when they do speak of liberation. In the first poem, Tufan writes of personal desire and unfulfillment, which is the basis for a greater demand for rights:

THIRST

A person here comes to life bearing the wish for the thrill of victory and after birth forgetting oneself lives the errant life of a lone person waged in a game of dice

At this time don't ask why his own dogs have mauled their master's legs Only upon regretting does a person understand his own life force and after that begin to see in his defeated eyes dreams of the thrill of victory

and on the travels of life begin to seek a new path on the long travels towards fulfilment

In the two poems below, Tufan's demand for liberation becomes larger, and his critique becomes more social—though it remains rooted in personal experience.

Songs of blessing

How Ani Choying Drolma honours and aids her sangha.

where the sisterhood could come for support—spiritual, educational or financial.

After two years of raising funds Ani Choying was ready to take on the foundation's first major project in 2000, the Arya Tara School for nuns, fittingly named after The Liberator. At Arya Tara nuns are given both a secular and a religious education. They learn Tibetan, Nepali, English, math, history, art, basic first aid along with religious scriptures and rituals. "Spiritual development certainly makes us wiser, but intellectual pursuits make us smarter," she says.

Ani Choying believes secular knowledge—including how to cook, clean and shop for food—will help Arya Tara nuns to better navigate their way in a world outside that of the nunnery, a necessity if they wish to be proponents of active compassion. The love and compassion preached by Buddhism needs more than just prayers, according to her. "Recycling the word 'compassion' is not enough, it must be accompanied by concrete action for society to benefit," says Ani Choying. Arya Tara is a school, not a nunnery that asks for a lifetime commitment. After their education, the young nuns will be encouraged to return home to Muktiath, Manasu, Helambu and even Tibet to so they can reach out to their community in an effective and practical manner. "Join us, get an education and leave. Come back with projects that the Nun's Welfare Centre can support," she

tells her young charges.

Arya Tara School is funded entirely through the proceeds of Ani Choying's concerts, CD sales and from private donations. In the past "the singing nun" has had to deal with traditionalists who viewed her use of the prayers as sacrilegious. She was wary of performing in Nepal but chose to do so to support Arya Tara. "I do not change the melody or the words. When I perform with others—like contemporary musicians—it becomes a bridge for others to experience the wonder in these prayers," she says. "It's like a beautiful woman whose beauty is not marred or altered when she wears jewellery or perfume."

Despite her popularity here and abroad, Ani Choying is remarkably focused, humble, and dedicated to the memory of her teacher: "This is a path I set on with the blessings of my guru, Tulku Urgen Rinpoche, who encouraged my singing and taught me the beautiful spiritual songs that I now perform." From him she learned the practice of Chod, or "cutting," helping to recognise and cut through egotistic tendencies. The chants used in this practice are the ones Ani Choying has spread the world over. Her voice has a natural clarity and organic quality that perfectly conveys the spontaneous and ecstatic nature of the songs.

Ani Choying Drolma will be

OBSTACLES MUST END

A stranger came to me and asked Don't you recognise me? Paralysed by uncertainty I stared for a long time but couldn't place him and said Forgive me Sir, I don't know who you are He said You don't recognise me? Me? I am the stifled sigh of your existence the truth you cannot live without your liberation Everything between us remained pending The wish to hear and learn more stayed unfulfilled as another person a stranger insinuated himself between us and sighing in monstrous satisfaction bound us with his wrathful eyes and said, There's a warrant in your names I have orders to bring you in These two parts of unrecognisability One of them reminds me of my life force the other erects himself as an obstacle to my liberation In this age when obstacles must end the obstacles to my liberation must also end now

These poems raise the question: What, in these regressive times, can writers do in order to continue establishing an argument for the expansion of democracy? What new expressions and what new forms can honor the complexity of our times' demand for liberation? Where is the literature that voices the freedom that is due the country?

Ramesh Tufan's poems are found in the collection *Ramesh Tufan Naam Hunulai* (To Have the Name of Ramesh Tufan), published by the Royal Nepal Academy in 1996.



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performing her fourth annual Kathmandu concert at 6PM on 25 May at the Durbar Hall, Hotel Yak and Yeti, to aid Arya Tara School build their new premises in Pharping. This year she will be accompanied by local jazz legends Cadenza, incorporating ancient Buddhist chants as well as Amazing Grace, the Jewish Shalom Malekham, the Gayatri Mantra and the Maha Mritunujaya Mantras. And what of the future? "Right now I am dedicated to the Nun's Welfare Foundation and I'll work for it as long as they need me but I look forward to going on retreat. I am blessed to receive more than I give," she says, quite unaware just how much we, her audience, receive in turn. ♦

Ani Choying Drolma's 4th Annual Kathmandu Concert: "Songs to cut through ego-clinging, traditional melodic Buddhist chant" at 6 PM on Sunday, 25 May. Yak & Yeti Hotel, Durbar Marg. Tickets Rs 600. Available at Yak & Yeti, Fire and Ice, Upstairs Bar, Summit Hotel, Double Dorje. Email: nwnepal@yahoo.com. 4436059

ABOUT TOWN

CELEBRATING EVEREST

- ❖ **24 May:** Durbar Marg Street festival- HAN, NATA, TAAN, REBAN, NATO and KMC.
- ❖ **25 May:** Lalitpur Durbar Square Festival.
- Everest** screening 4.30 PM at Nepal Tourism Board in aid of Pahariya village children, Chitwan. Tickets: Chitwan Jungle Lodge (4442240) and Ekta Books. (4245787)
- ❖ **26 May:** Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square Festival.
- ❖ **27 May:** Thamel Festival by Thamel Tourism Development Board
- 8.30-11AM** Procession of summiteers - Tundikhel, New road, Basantapur, Nara Devi, Chetrapati, Juddha Public School, Thamel, Tri Devi Marg, Kantipath, Jamal, Durbar Marg, ending at Annapurna Hotel.
- KMC felicitates Hillary
- Himalayan Environmental Trust Executive committee meeting
- UIAA Central Council meeting
- Rum Doodle dinner
- Everest Beer launch
- 4PM** Remembering Tenzing organised by Himal Association at Hotel Shangrila.
- ❖ **28 May:** Tree planting ceremony at the International Mountaineers Memorial Park at Kakani.
- 4PM** Tourism in Nepal: A Design for the Future, a Talk by Reinhold Messner organised by *Nepali Times* and *Die Zeit* at Dwarika's Hotel. By invitation only.
- 3-6PM** International Mountaineers Association general assembly at Hyatt Regency (location unconfirmed). Speeches by Prime Minister, Tourism Minister, Sir Edmund Hillary, Reinhold Messner, Junko Tabei, Appa Sherpa and Ang Tshering of NMA.
- Hillary inaugurates photo exhibition at British Council followed by reception at British Embassy.
- ❖ **29 May: 9-11AM** Symposium on Mountaineering and Development at BICC or Yak & Yeti (location unconfirmed). HRH Crown Prince presents medals to summiteers.
- 11:15 AM** onwards-Symposium with speeches by Hillary, Reinhold Messner and Junko Tabei. Philatelic and photo exhibition.
- 4-6 PM** Gathering of Everest Summiteers at Birendra International Convention Centre. Graced by Their Majesties, Prime Minister Chand, Ang Tshering of NMA, Appa Sherpa, Hillary, Junko Tabei, Gita Tortladze of International Mountaineers Association and Reinhold Messner.
- King Gyanendra decorates important mountain personalities.
- 6.25 PM** Their Majesties grant audience to Everest summiteers, followed by gala dinner.
- 6-9PM** Himalayan Trust dinner at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. Hillary launches Everest 50th Anniversary book.
- ❖ **30 May:** Bhaktapur Durbar Square Festival.
- ❖ **31 May:** Music Festival at Dasrath Stadium.

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Quomolangma: the other side of Everest** photographs and text by Lucia de Vries from 29 May till 4 June at gallery nine, Lazimpat. 4436944
- Kathmandu Vendors** paintings by Mark Jordans at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Contemporary Tibetan Art from Lhasa** till 14 June at Lotus Gallery, Thamel. 4253646
- ❖ **French Animation in all its Glory** Film festival at the Russian Cultural Centre 24, 25 May. 24: 12.30 PM Bestaire/ The Menagerie, 2.30 PM Contes Mordenes/ Modern Tales, 5PM: Kirkou et la Sorciere. 25: 12.30 PM Courses poursuites et Polars/ Whodunits and Chases, 2.30 PM Envols/ Taking Flight, 5PM Mondes Familiers, monde insolites/ Familiar and unusual world.
- ❖ **West of the Silk Route** pictures of life and landscapes from Egypt through Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal by Ben Schonveld from 26 May till 2 June at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Newa Mahotsav** 23-27 May at Khulla Manch, Tundikhel.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Ani Choying Drolma's 4th Annual Kathmandu Concert** accompanied by Cadenza to benefit Anya Tara School. 4PM on 25 May at Durbar Hall, Hotel Yak & Yeti.
- ❖ **East meets West: the twain shall meet** 30 May at Dwarika's. Fusion music, oriental and continental cuisine. 4479488
- ❖ **Open Adoption Day** at the SPCAN Karuna Rescue and Rehab Centre 1-4PM at Siphel on 25 May. Puppies available. 4467953, 4414332 or 981043662. For directions see www.fospcan.org.np
- ❖ **Quomolangma: the other side of Everest** talk by Lhakpa Sherpa, manager of the Quomolangma Conservation Program at 6.30 PM on 30, 31 May. Rs 200 entry. All proceeds to cleft palate surgery for Tibetan children. Advance booking essential. gallery nine, Lazimpat. 4436944
- ❖ **La Cabana-Salsa Night** 8PM on 23 May at the Jazz Bar, Shangi-la Hotel, Lazimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Deepak Bajracharya** Live smoke free concert. Tickets: Rs 200. 1PM on 24 May at Dashrath Stadium, Tripureshore. 5529726

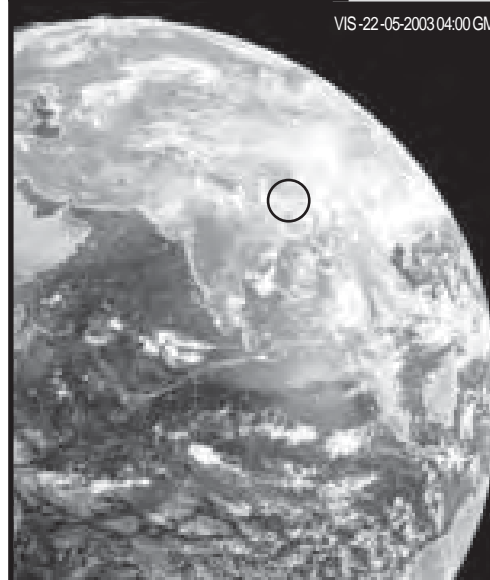
MUSIC

- ❖ **Live Music** Friday at 5.30 PM, Saturday movie at 4.30 PM. Jivin' Joe's Restaurant, Kuponole.
- ❖ **Abhaya with the Steam Injuns** 7PM every Friday at Moksh in Hardic Club, Jhamsikhel. 5528703
- ❖ **Live Acoustic Jam** 7PM on Saturdays at Himalatte Café, Thamel. 4256738
- ❖ **Full Circle** acoustic jam every Friday at New Orleans Café, Thamel. 4427311

FOOD

- ❖ **Wood fired pizzas, Baskin Robbins ice-cream, cocktails and coffee** at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **Celebrating Everest and the summiteers** 20 percent discount on all clay oven pizza at Stupa View Vegetarian Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 4480262
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Dieter's delight at Kathmandu Guest House's Food Court, Thamel. 4413632
- ❖ **Kids Combo Meal** at all Bakery Cafés. Kids' meals with exciting gifts.
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** new summer menu Yak & Yeti Hotel. 4248999
- ❖ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** at Durbar Marg for buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialities.

NEPALI WEATHER



VIS-22-05-2003 04:00 GMT

This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows the trough that brought rain to Kathmandu Valley. It moved swiftly eastwards, but seems to have left the summit of Mt Everest above it all. (*Summit area is circled*) The weather on top was good enough for 20+ climbers to summit from the south side on Thursday. There is a weak jet stream at the summit of up to 22 metres/sec. Down in the midhills, storm systems have been moving across the Mahabharat bringing brief moderate-to-heavy pre-monsoon thunderstorms. All this caused by tentacles of moisture creeping up from the Bay of Bengal, ahead of the real monsoon which is still gathering strength off Kerala.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
30-15	31-16	30-15	30-14	30-15

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

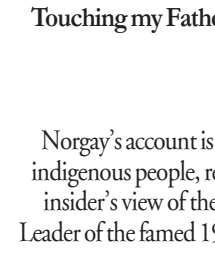
BOOKWORM



Everest: Summit of Achievement Stephen Venables
Lustr Press, 2003
Rs 3,200

This is the first and only book to benefit from complete access to the Royal Geographical Society's rich collection of photographs, documents and artifacts. Painstakingly selected from over 20,000 subjects and more than 400 photographs, it records the surveying, planning and expeditions beginning in 1921 and culminating in Hillary and Norgay's landmark feat. Contributors include

Joanna Wright, John Keay, Ed Douglas and Tashi and Judy Tenzing. Foreword by Sir Edmund Hillary.



Touching my Father's Soul: A Sherpa's journey to the top of Everest Jamling Tenzing Norgay with Broughton Coburn
Harper San Francisco
Rs 1,725

Norgay's account is the first modern account of the Everest experience from the unheard voice of its indigenous people, revealing a fascinating and profound world that few have ever seen. It gives us an insider's view of the Sherpa world as he tells a story of Everest unlike any told before. As Climbing Leader of the famed 1996 Everest IMAX expedition led by David Breashears, he was able to follow in the footsteps of his legendary mountaineer father, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa.



Triumph on Everest: A Tribute from the Sherpas of Nepal Ang Rita Sherpa and Susan Hovik (eds)

Eco-Himal, The Mountain Institute, Mandala Book Point, 2003

This book not only provides a broad picture of Everest and its mountaineers but also that of the Everest region, and the lives and experiences of its people over the past 50 years. A tribute to Sir Edmund Hillary from the Sherpa people of Nepal, it commemorates the golden jubilee of the first ascent of Everest. The book will be officially released by Sir Edmund Hillary on 29 May at the Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

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❖ शिक्षा उपहार होइन ।


❖ शिक्षा बालबालिकाको अधिकार हो ।

Armaan has a star-studded cast with legends like Amitabh Bachan and Randhir Kapoor backed by Bollywood names like Anil Kapoor, Preity Zinta and Gracy Singh. Directed by Honey Irani and with music from the hit trio Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, this movie has all the right ingredients for box office success. As the title suggests, *Armaan* is a film about hope and the extent to which a son goes to fulfill his father's dreams. The story leads to an unusual climax where each of the characters is forced to tread the fine line between extremes of duty, devotion and finally even emotional sanity. *Armaan* is a family drama with something for everyone.

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Sun-Fri	2000-2030	आजका कुरा (सप्तासमयिक विषयमा बहस)
Sat	0800-0830	शान्ति अभियान
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Sherpa Hillary

MICHAEL DILLON

We are on a Yeti Airways flight, just taken off from Kathmandu. In front of me sits a large old man in a woollen cardigan, his hair grey and tousled, his face as craggy as the mountains below. He is deep in thought.

Perhaps he's remembered that today is the anniversary of the saddest day of his life. The day his wife and youngest daughter took off from the very same airport and minutes later died. Or perhaps he's thinking of Everest. It has come into view now. A giant black pyramid above the clouds.

How strange that the planet's highest peak is almost exactly the right height: custom built by the gods just high enough to test human beings to their limit. At twice the height it would be impossible, at half the height inconsequential.

Fifty years ago, no one knew if it was possible to climb it. Many had tried, many had died. But in the early morning of 29 May 1953, two brave men worked their way along its virgin knife-edged summit ridge. On their backs were oxygen cylinders so heavy their weight almost cancelled out their advantage. On their minds, the scientist's warnings that if their oxygen cylinders stopped working, they would probably die.

One of these legendary heroes, Tenzing Norgay, is long dead. The other sits in front of me, Edmund Hillary. Everest, that great event in his life, has faded from view now, and his face warms as the plane banks to reveal the terraced Sherpa villages. The ground rushes to meet us and we are bumping along a grassy airstrip well known to Hillary, he built it.

A huge crowd surges forward as Hillary pauses at the doorway of the plane to take in a lungful of thin air. But what the atmosphere lacks in oxygen it makes up for in affection. There is love in everyone's eyes, welcome scarves and flowers. Soon Hillary is amongst them, embracing a doctor from a hospital he has built, a nurse from a health clinic he has built, a pupil from one of 30 schools he has built, and other players in his 40 years of secret service to the people of Everest. The man who climbed their highest mountain has gone on climbing higher into their hearts.

How he would have laughed if you'd told him his life would be like this. I have an image of him back in 1931 in his own rural setting, a bee farm out of Auckland. He is 12, short and scrawny, uncomfortable in his own body, uncomfortable amongst others. At school he prefers the company of the ants in the playground to his fellow pupils, and in the physical education class he has been placed in the hopeless squad.

The mountain people are leading him up a hill now, one of his oldest Sherpa friends supporting him by the arm, others poised to help should Hillary's 80-year-old body falter. For over 40 years they have watched him come to them, in the early years trekking for weeks from Kathmandu with hundreds of porters carrying building supplies. Now he comes by air and less often. But each visit is treasured. And each visit they know may be his last.

He is here to work. He and his team. One of his team is walking beside him, a bearded man with a twinkle in his eye, also about 80. He is George Lowe, the other New Zealander on that successful British Everest Expedition of 1953. If they'd had their way they would have climbed to the summit together but fate, or rather expedition politics, decreed otherwise. Not only did the leader John Hunt not countenance a colonial summit team upstaging the English team members. Hunt had even dropped them from the expedition some months prior to departure, but reinstated them after being persuaded quite prophetically by the English team members that Hillary and Lowe's alpine skills could well mean the difference between success and failure.

Some years after the successful climb, some Sherpa friends were sharing the fire with Hillary and Lowe when Hillary asked his head sherpa, "Urkein, if there was just one thing we could do for our Sherpa friends what would they want it to be?" The reply was immediate. "Sir, we would like a school for our children." Next year, Hillary and his team built a simple school in the Sherpa village of Khumjung and soon the first batch of eager barefoot Sherpa children, faces

After climbing Mt Everest 50 years ago, Edmund Hillary is climbing higher still.



Hillary working with hammer and nails on a school in Pangboche in 1963, Hillary's first wife Louise with Peter and Sarah in 1956.



AUCKLAND MUSEUM



MICHAEL DILLON

brightly polished for the occasion, stepped into their wooden benched classroom and began a journey that would take some to incredible heights.

When word spread through other villages and other valleys, Hillary was avalanched with petitions. At Thani village the monks and elders composed a petition that was presented to Hillary by a 10-year-old boy. They had written: "Our children have eyes but still they are blind. Please build a school in our village too." So next year Thani village, where Tenzing Norgay had grown up, had a school of its own.

Hillary and his teams have now built thirty schools, as well as two hospitals, two airstrips, many bridges and many health clinics. A forty year labour of love, fashioning rocks he used to climb into school and hospital walls, working with Sherpa and Western building teams, including his brother Rex who worked as building foreman on these projects for twenty five consecutive years.

Hillary is among friends. Ang Rita was in the first batch of children from

Khumjung and went on to top the SLC. Now he is Hillary's right-hand man, the full time administrator of the Himalayan Trust. Hillary's son Peter is taking pictures, shuffling a little painfully having only recently returned from hauling a heavy sled uphill for 84 days to the South Pole.

Nothing's been too easy in life for

Peter. As the son of the most famous New Zealander it's been hard for Peter to blossom as his own person in the giant shadow of his father. But he's stepped well out of that shadow now, followed his father's footsteps up Everest in 1990 and has recently followed his own footsteps to the summit of Everest again.

Peter was the first child born to Hillary and his wife Louise, whom Hillary had courted in Sydney where she was studying music. Two other children soon followed, daughters Sarah and Belinda. By then Hillary's building activities in Nepal were in full swing and it wasn't long before three little Hillary children were carrying rocks along with Sherpa children, each doing what they could. These family trips to Nepal, living and working with the Sherpa people, were the happiest times in Hillary's life, and 1975 was meant to be the happiest time of all.

That year Hillary, Louise and their now teenage children had decided to spend the entire year in Nepal. Hillary had gone on ahead to supervise the building of his second hospital and his family would join him in stages.

His wife Louise and youngest daughter Belinda, 16, would be first in and on 31 March 1975 they set off with the family dog and some Sherpa friends to Kathmandu airport to fly in to join him. Louise had always been fearful of light planes and wanted to walk in, but Hillary had persuaded her to fly.

A young New Zealand pilot met them at the airport and soon they were taxiing for takeoff. Perhaps in the excitement of transporting half the Hillary family, the pilot had omitted one pre-flight check. He had forgotten to remove the pins that unlock the tail flaps. The plane took off, the tail flaps still locked in stall position. It came crashing down into a field killing all on board.

Hillary, standing on the mountain airstrip on which they should by now have landed, had a premonition that something terrible had happened, and a friend soon arrived by helicopter to break the dreadful news. Hillary helicoptered back to Kathmandu and felt compelled to land at the crash site. He would have nightmares for years to come.

That night Hillary cremated the two people he loved most in the world, his wife and youngest daughter. And his only wish that night was to join them. For days he struggled with inconsolable grief made worse by his belief that it was all his fault, that he'd made them fly rather than walk. His two remaining children, Peter and Sarah on arrival in Kathmandu were warned by their grandmother, "Your father will never be the same again. He's heavily drugged, curled up in a ball, sobbing."

It was the hardest thing that tough man ever did, clawing himself back from the brink of suicide. He would stay alive, he decided, for what was left of his family. He would stay alive because of his responsibilities to the Sherpa people. He would return to the hills and his half completed hospital, and work and weep with his Sherpa friends.

Hospital completed, Hillary returned to Auckland. The family house felt like an empty shell and he felt the same. As part of his self-healing he would throw himself into the organisation of an expedition he and his late wife had often talked of doing together, journeying by jetboat along the entire length of India's River Ganges.

➔ see p16

"I know no man with less reason to be humble, yet know no man more humble."



Sir Ed with Lady June pose recently in Kathmandu, and a Sherpa schoolgirl pores over her book at Hillary's first school in Khumjung.

from p15

It would prove an extraordinary expedition, in Hillary's opinion his most memorable ever. No expedition in history had ever been done in such public gaze. You could hardly see the Ganges banks for people, hundreds deep, here to catch a glimpse of these magic boats and the hero of Everest.

Hillary and his late wife Louise had had as closest friends Peter Mulgrew and his wife June. Peter had been on expeditions with Hillary in Antarctica and the Himalayas and they and their wives had been an inseparable foursome. But in 1979, four years after Louise's death, Peter Mulgrew died, also in an air crash. At the last moment he had taken Hillary's place as guest commentator on an Air New Zealand flight to Antarctica which crashed into Mount Erebus, killing all on board.

The foursome was now a twosome, and soon the twosome became one. In 1985, Hillary became New Zealand High Commissioner to India with June at his side. During these High Commission years Hillary could often be seen not on the cocktail circuit but high on a schoolhouse roof, sleeves rolled up banging in nails. And here they are in Nepal again, Sir Edmund and June, Lady Hillary. Now long married and now long associated in this work in Nepal, they sit together listening to petitions from red-robed monks have come with photos of their distant monastery and are seeking support to enlarge its courtyard.

The children of the Phaplu primary school, their dusty red school uniforms held together by an equal measure of buttons and safety pins, are not just carrying schoolbooks today. Each child has a beautiful arrangement of red rhododendrons of Edmund Hillary.

The teachers form the children into a line that stretches from the school almost to Hillary's hotel. Hillary makes his way along the line of beaming children, each one handing him their own little gift of thanks, the flowers from their forest. At the school Hillary and his party are led through various rooms. George Lowe, on retirement as Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools in the UK, travelled incognito around all the Hillary schools and recommended curriculum development. The results have been spectacular. The team of Hillary and Lowe (Hillary building schools, Lowe supervising teaching standards) has pulled off something special, just as they did in 1953.

After the summit team of Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans gave up at the South Summit on 26 May, it was Hillary and Tenzing's turn. They had a three man team to help them establish a higher camp: Ang Nyima, Alf

Gregory and George Lowe. It was Lowe who cut the steps to the highest camp, carrying the most, and putting up Hillary and Tenzing's tent. They discuss whether Lowe should stay with them for tomorrow's summit push, for a three man team may be valuable if the route proves very technical. But there is insufficient oxygen for three. Lowe wishes them well and walks downhill into obscurity.

Next morning Hillary and Tenzing set off for the summit.

Snow conditions are dangerous. Slopes could avalanche, and on any other mountain they would have turned back. But nothing will stop these men, not the danger, not their pitiful oxygen supply, not the steep, jagged, endless summit ridge. At 11.30 am on 29 May, two brave men from the fringes of world society embraced on the roof of the world.

The entire team flew to London, and the New Zealanders Hillary and Lowe for months bemusedly shared a black tie existence, treating the upper class with respect but not too much respect. They wouldn't attend a function, they joked to each other, unless there was at least one Duke present. A long lecture tour followed which also served as Hillary and his new wife Louise's honeymoon. Then it was back to their day jobs, Hillary to his bees, Lowe to his teaching. They reunited on other expeditions in Antarctica and the Himalayas.

The opening of the Hillary schools fostered alternative vocations for Sherpa children, helping many through their knowledge of English, to move faster through the ranks of trekking companies, many of which they now own. The Medical Superintendents at both Hillary Hospitals are Sherpa doctors, another, now a PhD in Forestry, is Warden of Mount Everest National Park. Another boy, who used to make aeroplanes from pieces of left over school building wood, now pilots jumbo jets in Europe. Another boy, who used to drive his teachers mad by drawing helicopters on every available surface, is now a helicopter pilot.

Next morning the flying Sherpa, Captain Dawa, arrives with his helicopter to transport Hillary and his party to Mount Everest School, its pupils mostly sons and daughters of Tibetan refugees. It's a long steep slope up to the school from the level ground where the helicopter has landed. A long hard climb. Once again the path is lined with beaming children offering Hillary flowers and silk scarves. But the atmosphere is muted. It is clear Hillary is suffering. He climbs slowly, his face is deathly pale and he is slurring his words. He is playing Russian roulette with his respiratory system.

Ever since Everest, Hillary has had problems with altitude. On a subsequent Himalayan peak he had a slight stroke and at the end of his Ocean to Sky Ganges Expedition he had a very lucky escape indeed. After abandoning the Ganges when the river became a waterfall, Hillary and his team set out to climb a peak as a symbolic end to the journey. Hillary was 59 but insisted on carrying as much as everyone else. Next morning at the highest camp he collapsed with cerebral oedema. There was no cure except rapid descent, and the team of old climbing friends hauled him down the mountain to an Indian Army post from where he was evacuated in a helicopter.

But here he is, 80-years-old, tempting fate once more. Today's summit is Mount Everest School, still a long slope away, and it's clear Hillary is putting more effort into this climb than he did on Everest in 1953.

Some days later Hillary travels by helicopter to spend some time in the villages closer to Everest, where his work began. The trekking trails to Everest pass through these villages and young western trekkers stare at this old man wondering what on earth he is doing here in young people's territory. Often I have watched Hillary sit quietly in tea shops while young

trekkers, not recognising him, boast about their own trekking exploits.

I once filmed Hillary up here sitting on a rock, casually holding an ice axe, reminiscing with his son Peter. An American trekker chanced upon us, watched for a while, and unable to contain himself any longer, said to Hillary, "Hey, Bud, that's not the way to hold an ice axe," and proceeded to show him how to do it. Hillary thanked him but said nothing else. The American went off, still oblivious. Maybe the bee stings from his youth inoculated him from the Great Man syndrome. I know no man with less reason to be humble, yet know no man more humble.

In the village of Khunde Hillary enters his second home, the house of Ang Dooli, the wife of Hillary's dearest Sherpa friend, Mingma Tsering. Mingma was the foreman of all Hillary's early building projects. He could neither read nor write, but had a memory for detail that out-rivalled a computer. Mingma is dead now but his wife Ang Dooli, half Hillary's height, bustles about gathering ingredients for tea. This house was the Hillary family base in the happy days when Hillary, his wife Louise and their children were all here together working. Ang Dooli is the Hillary children's surrogate mother, their Sherpa mother.

In a corner of a room adorned with Hillary family photos, sits Ang Dooli's deaf mute son Temba. He is hard at work on his latest painting, a beautiful stylised landscape of the region complete with a yeti or two. Of Ang Dooli's eleven children, Temba was one of only three who survived childhood, a typical statistic which made Hillary realise early on how urgent it was to do something about the health needs of a region where iodine deficiency and other maladies were endemic. In 1965 he built the Khunde hospital which now treats 9,000 patients a year. In 1975, he built a 20 bed hospital in Paphlu and has built and staffed over a dozen village health clinics.

Downhill from Ang Dooli's house is Khumjung school. In 1983, Tenzing joined Hillary at the school to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their Everest climb. They sat together laughing uproariously as the children reenacted their famous climb on a rock in the school playground. That would be the last occasion Hillary and Tenzing would be together in the Himalayas. Three years later, in 1986, Tenzing died of pneumonia.

Tenzing, like many Sherpa second sons, had trained to become a monk but the life didn't suit him and he left for distant Darjeeling in the hope of getting portering work on the Everest Expeditions that used to pass through there. After climbing Everest, Tenzing continued to live in Darjeeling where India's Prime Minister Nehru had set up a lifetime position for him at the Indian Mountaineering Institute. With his modest salary, increasing family responsibilities and his physical distance from the people of Everest, Tenzing did feel saddened that he couldn't do more for his own people, and there developed some degree of unease between him and Hillary. But in Tenzing's declining years, which coincided with Hillary's years as New Zealand's High Commissioner to India, they saw a lot of each other and rekindled the deep friendship and respect they shared in 1953.

A few days later, back in Phaplu, the sun is setting. The day's work almost done Hillary is exhausted. George Lowe is reflective, and tries to put words to his thoughts. "There is no end to the need here. It is an uphill task. But that's Ed's strength, uphill tasks. I've seen it on Everest and I see it still. He'll just keep plugging on until he can't go one step more."

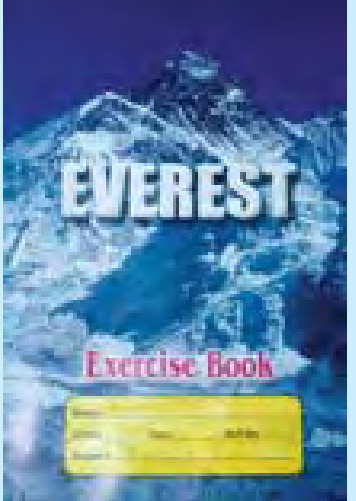
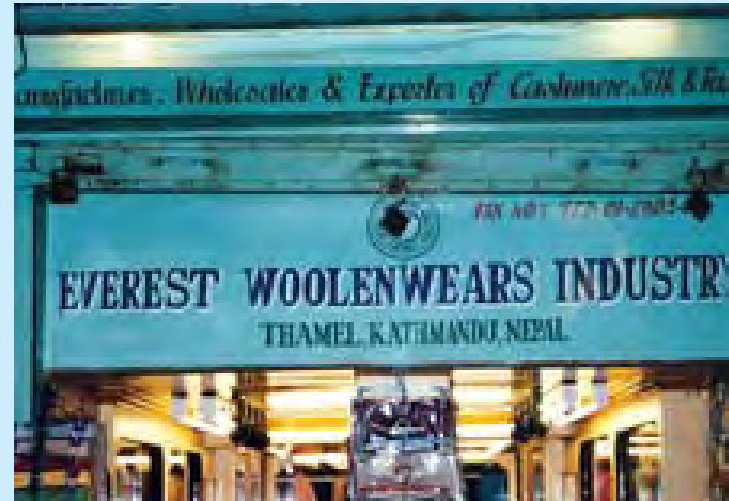
(Michael Dillon is one of the world's leading mountain cinematographers and documentary filmmakers. He took part in the First Australian Everest Expedition 1984.)



Branding Everest

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Fifty years on, Everest has become a brand-name like no other. The name itself evokes the pinnacle of achievement and quality and is therefore ideal for all kinds of products and services. The only merchandise we haven't yet heard of are Everest Foam Mattress, Everest Undertakers or Everest Tranquilisers. But there is an Everest Nursing Home, if that's any consolation. We trawled the Valley to track the ascent of the most popular brand name in the country. From the ice-cream seller to the airline service, it's an 8,850m-tall statement with Everest/Sagarmatha/Chomolungma.





Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Some more Declassified Ads

REQUEST FOR QUOTATIONS

Veteran journalist seeks interview with any minister who can furnish quotes for an article on Present State of the Nation. No guarantee that quote will be accurate or contextualised. Only ministers who have nothing to say will be entertained. Interviews once published cannot be denied, or withdrawn. Contact: 'Quoteman'

COUNTRY TO-LET

Country in semi-knockdown condition is available for long-term lease to qualified Class One Contractors with at least 25 years experience in managing failed states. Present owners have messed it up so much that selected team will have to pretty much start from scratch. Interested firms can inspect aforementioned unserviceable country in stripped condition in as-it-always-was condition anytime in its landlocked location, provided they do not disturb the deep slumber of its current rulers.

Leasee reserves right to accept or reject all applicant teams in full or part thereof without assigning any reason whatsoever. In other words, we'll pick whoever we like and the rest of you can go chew the cud.

Successful team will have to take part from Day One in all duties of state including: launching websites, delivering key-note speeches at regional conferences on the importance of being earnest in the age of economic globalisation, and attending ribbon-cutting ceremonies to mark the Destruction Nepal Year 2004 Campaign.

VACANCIES

A Soft State Between Two Boulders is re-advertising for the following openings:

A Saviour:

Should be an almighty, omnipresent know-it-all patron deity who can solve all our problems overnight so we won't have to worry about anything anymore. Knowledge of website design and Flash applications will be an advantage. Sri Pashupatinath eligible to reapply.

An Interim All-Party Government (Housekeeping):

Candidate must exhibit leadership qualities and command a competent team of technocrats. Only teams with absolutely no experience in horsetrading, passing the buck, wheeling-dealing, street arson, organising three-day bandhs, forcing school lockouts, kleptomania, junketeering, and selling-out the national interest need apply. On-the-job experience and career advancement guaranteed.

Trainee Chief Executive Officer:

Should be at least SLC Pass, and capable of understanding and carrying out orders from higher-up authority. Can be made permanent and promoted to Food and Beverage Manager if performance is satisfactory in organising and managing parties.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The Federation of Boarding Schools South of the Border (FoBS-SoB) is in the process of drawing up a roster of senior Nepali political figures involved in ordering the current campaign of school closures who want to send their children to schools down south. Politicos interested in participating in the above-mentioned one-time offer may collect application forms at all leading party headquarters. Strictly on last-come-last-served basis, seats unlimited. Only politicians able to prove genuine commitment to wrecking Nepal's education system need apply. Motto: Nepal's Loss is Our Gain.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Temba's other dream

Not letting fame go to his head was harder than climbing the world's highest mountain for 18-year-old Temba Chhiri Sherpa, the youngest Sagarmatha summiteer. On 28 May 2001, just a few days past his 16th birthday he set foot on top of the world. "I was just an ordinary boy-next-door when I left, but on my return I became a celebrity—I had never seen so many cameras, and all of them were pointed at me," he says.

But fame came at a price. The responsibility attached to being a summiteer, and the youngest at that, took away from the adventure and excitement of being a 'normal' teenager. Temba has an image to maintain, and other non-climbing ambitions to reach. "Sometimes I

yearn to be among people my own age," he confides.

Born in Dolakha, Temba grew up in the shadow of the majestic Gauri Shankar. He learnt the basics of climbing while shepherding animals in the steep terrain and walking the trails to and from his village school. Temba's first attempt on Sagarmatha, when he was only 14, ended in failure. Five of his fingers had to be amputated because of frostbite. The mountain doesn't allow itself to be conquered easily, and with the wisdom of hindsight Temba compares his two expeditions: "In the first one I was too young and inexperienced. I didn't have enough training or

proper equipment."

This modest student from Kathmandu's Sidhartha Vanasthali high school will be invited to next week's 50th anniversary celebrations and will get to chat with fellow-summiteers old enough to be his grandfathers. Temba loves adventure sports, but mountaineering is not his priority at present. "There are too many risks," he says. Instead, he wants to concentrate on applying to college while waiting for his SLC results. "I need a good education to fulfil my other dream," says Temba, speaking about his determination to return to his village in Dolakha to start a school for quality education. ♦



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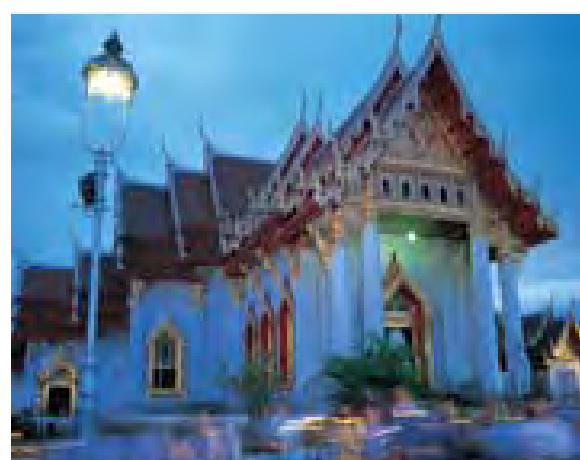
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