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Weekly Internet Poll # 126


Q. How would you describe the status of human rights in Nepal?

| Response | Percentage |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Improving | 11.3% |
| The same | 12.8% |
| Deteriorating | 75.0% |
| Don't know | 1.7% |
| Total votes | 1,180 |



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Q. How do you gauge the prospect of the Nepali Congress reuniting?

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**Schools are
turning into
battlefields,
children are being
taught to fight**

War school



A Maoist militia unit drill in the playground of the Pipal Secondary School in Rukum two weeks ago.

AKASH CHETTRI

AKASH CHETTRI in RUKUM

School principal Birbhan Puri of Birendra Higher Secondary School has spent sleepless nights waiting for 65 of his students abducted by Maoists to return home.

Since they were taken away in Bafikot on 25 February, all Puri, his colleagues and the children's parents can do is pray. The rest of the students are so traumatised that they are afraid to go to school.

"We have no idea where they were taken, their exams had just

started," says Puri, adding that the Maoists may be training them to become militants. Since the other children are not attending classes, fearing that they may also be abducted, Puri has closed down the school for now.

Across the midwestern districts of Rukum, Achham and Rolpa, the few schools that have managed to stay open so far, against all odds, are being forced to close. There are no security forces to be seen and the only presence of the civil service or government are teachers like Puri.

In a bid to strengthen what

they proudly call their 'Child Militia', the Maoists are tapping schools across the region for students in grade 9 and 10. Earlier, the students would be taken and the teachers told they were just going to attend cultural programs or political lectures. Now, there are no explanations, school yards are being turned into parade grounds and classrooms into military training centres.

To be sure, the security forces are also using schools as campsites and barracks. Usually, in these remote hills, schools are strategically located along ridgetops. They have

large rooms and wide open playgrounds. Some schools have literally turned into battlefields when soldiers on patrol come upon Maoists in schools, or vice versa. Five children were killed during a fire during a fire in the Sharada Secondary School at Mudbara in Doti district in December, and hundreds of villagers fled Khimdi in Kailali in January when fighting broke out around a school compound where the army was camped.

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A guru of love

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A GURU OF LOVE

Our nights have never been darker. The gloom turns to doom with each week that this nightmare of conflict and confusion drags on. Warring sides gauge their success on a daily score of body counts, and the measure of victory is how many more Nepalis each side has killed that day, and this whole fratricidal madness takes us into an area of darkness from which, sometimes, there seems to be no escape. This week's score in Bhojpur was 30:20.

Who won? Are we competing to reach a threshold of death in order to build up a momentum for peace again? If so, how many dead Nepalis is enough? Each death inures us, numbs us, so the next time we hear the names of those killed, it isn't as sad as the previous time. Like taking poison in small doses, we develop a resistance to pain.

There is dangerous hawktalk that we have to wage war to restore peace. Hardliners think people who are for non-violence are unrealistic dreamers, that Gandhi was mad and peaceniks are hopeless romantics. But by waging war, you don't get any nearer to peace, you just pile up more dead bodies. And, as we see in the reportage from the field in this and other papers, most of the dead in our war are not people who are fighting.

As we mourn this week's dead, the pampered Valley refuses to give up its preoccupation with day-to-day politics. Politicians wrestle each other to be on top in their petty games of intrigue and one-upmanship as they sink slowly into the quicksand.

But it is when the night is darkest that even a tiny wick appears bright. In its murky glow we catch a glimpse of the world as it should be: where words like idealism, service, compassion and faith are not clichés, and still carry meaning. We come across someone who teaches us the inherent goodness of the human spirit and coaxes it out of those around him.

Fr Eugene Watrin was a guru who taught us love, who showed how each life must help another to live, and how we must give back to society what society gave us. Even though our government never recognised this self-adopted Nepali as a citizen, many hundreds of his students regarded him as a compatriot. Students to whom he also taught the force of the written word, so that when we read these lines, we hear his voice still.

Educating foreigners

Outsiders turn to insiders for insight, they ought to also read up

When an experienced foreign 'Nepal hand' recently left the country, he took with him his inside knowledge of all that ails us now. Another influential foreigner who has acquired in-depth knowledge

GUEST COLUMN
Manjushree Thapa



will be leaving soon, and with him will go another store of expertise. Both will be replaced by newcomers who will, naturally, take months or even years to pick up Nepal's subtleties and nuances, wherein hide its truths. Meanwhile, it will fall on their Nepali contacts to educate them.

Nepalis with some (even limited) relations with the international community in Nepal are often obliged to explain their country to confused 'experts,'

going over obscure events from decades or even centuries ago, examining any number of social issues, decoding the mysteries of current politics. Of course, outsiders will turn to insiders for insight: and insiders often enjoy sharing their wisdom. The problem is, many foreigners in Nepal's international community seem to rely more on cocktail hour chatter than on in-depth study to learn about this country, where they wield great influence.

Recently, an aid industry consultant who has worked here for more than six years remarked that she had not read more than a bare sketch of Nepal's history. "In no other country where I've worked would I be allowed to do that," she admitted. "Here, the development sector has no historical memory. There is no compulsion for us to understand

the past."

To be fair, most Nepalis also have a poor sense of history. The reason? Only in 1990 were we freed from the Panchayat era's flat, propagandistic 'Ode to the Shahs' version of our past. Only since then have we begun to discover, for real, who we have been and who we are now.

The histories of our dissidents, for example, is only just being written. Because the political parties were underground, many Nepalis are only now learning about what they have done. Women, dalits and janajatis have yet to write themselves into our history. And new facts about Nepal are emerging every day. New perspectives are opening up. Are we brave Gurkha soldiers or exploited mercenaries? We don't know. Should women really be



ROBIN SAYAMI

LETTERS

DFID REPLIES

This in response to Daniel Lak's 'No Nepal' (#184) where he alleges that DFID's vision on development is confined to seminars and workshops. This is far from the truth. DFID Nepal does not normally fund workshops unless they are of strategic importance. And saying DFID *does not deliver* is also unwarranted. DFID delivers important development benefits to rural communities in Nepal, as we would have been pleased to demonstrate had someone checked with us before going into print. The visit of Nepali politicians to Northern Ireland is also far from being a *junket*. The seminar lasted five days and effective working hours were 9 am until 7.30 pm usually with one hour for lunch. In response to the participants need for information and discussion, working hours were lengthened!

The trip to Northern Ireland was also more than an isolated seminar. This was part of a long process of interactive events that DFID has supported within Nepal to assist Nepalis in developing a

negotiations process. It is not only politicians who benefit from such seminars but they are a key target group. In every country in conflict, it is politicians who are blamed for creating the problem, but it is often more complicated than that. Delivering a democratic peace requires political parties to be active in the peace process. It is critical that they begin to learn from other politicians how this can be done. The Northern Ireland seminar gave an opportunity for Nepali politicians to interact with politicians there from across the political spectrum. They were able to explore the influences

that turned insurgent organisations there into political parties. They met civil society activists and human rights organisations and individuals who were critically involved in delivering the Good Friday Agreement. Comparative conflict studies by democratic politicians are an established method of developing conflict resolution expertise within countries. The UK government has recognised this in its sponsorship of similar studies all over the world.

David Wood,
Head of DFID Nepal

SHAME

Michael Griesbaum is right to question whether health in Mugu is as far behind that in Kathmandu (Letters, #183) as I asserted in 'Diagnosing Nepal' (#182). Since there is no registry of vital events in Nepal, life expectancy statistics are estimates at best. The numbers were taken from the recent census and reported in *District Drug Use and Health Profile 2002*

published by INRUD. Infant mortality is also considered highest in Mugu, so these data are consistent. Griesbaum might take solace from knowing that the gap in the USA is over 40 years (as reported in 'US Patterns of Mortality by County and Race: 1965-1994' published by the Harvard School of Public Health). Shame on us all, everywhere.

Stephen Bezruchka,
University of Washington

WHAT IF?

It struck me after reading your editorial ('Tearing ourselves apart', #185) that while I have been driving my motorbike freely these past weeks in defiance of bandas no one has ever stopped me, nor have I met with any problems. On the contrary, I see others like me also confidently venturing out and not bowing to the anarchy of strikes called by a few students with utter disregard of the welfare of the vast majority of the people. What if half the population of this country who own private vehicles were to defy the bandas as a symbol of their democratic rights? Maybe a few people would be

hassled, or a few stones thrown at us, but I believe that strikes like these will crumble before they even start, and the powers that be would think twice before dominating their views over the mass of public. This option is not open to shopkeepers and businesses unfortunately, as they are, literally, sitting targets for intimidation and mob violence. And another what if. What if the students and friends like Lek Nath Neupane, instead of following their autocratic and feudal leaders who are in it only for power, use their time to convince the general public of the worthiness of their cause against injustice, corruption and self-interest? Instead of bemoaning these strikes everytime they are held and saying "Nepal khatam bhayo" how about doing something about them? We care about our future, please don't insult our intelligence. Come and speak to us rather than making pronouncements on our behalf. Maybe we will listen and take risks together for the future of our country if you can show integrity.

Janak Wagley, Patan



equal to men? We are not sure. Are the Khadkis a dalit caste or not? That's up for debate. What is the economic status of the Chepangs as compared to the Chettris? It's anyone's guess. The fact is, we are only now coming into definition as a country.

The intellectual ferment of our times is not obvious to the newcomer to Nepal. What is obvious is the day-to-day muddle of a country undergoing immense social and political transformation.

This muddle must be catching; for it is visible everywhere in Kathmandu's diplomatic and aid sectors. One glaring example: the weird, willful optimism in the international community when King Gyanendra took over in October 2003. Despite publicly committing to democracy, in private most diplomats and aid workers were sighing in relief, and even, cautiously, celebrating. "What better option is there?" went the cocktail hour chatter of the day.

The better option, of course, was to place the king's takeover in historical perspective, seeing it as an aberrant blip in the ongoing struggle to establish democracy in Nepal. Nepal's political enlightenment came thanks primarily to the dissidents of the 1930s and 1940s. Had the political parties not liberated the country from Rana rule in 1950, we would not have awakened to our rights. The underground activism of the 1970s and 1980s, and the 1990 people's movement unleashed ever-expanding drives for liberty and equality. Without the political parties that the international community so loves to disparage, there would be no women's movement in Nepal, no dalit movement, no janajati movement. There would be no unions, associations or forums to address public grievances.

If foreign 'Nepal hands' were properly educated about Nepal's past, they would be more sympathetic to the political parties, despite the parties' inexperience. After all, less than 15 years of Nepali history have been spent on the exercise of democracy: give it 20 years, democracy will work out its kinks. Lacking this historical perspective, influential foreigners here get derailed by cocktail hour chatter and the slapped-together pseudo-scholarship of such geniuses (not) as Robert Gersony. They throw their weight behind the anachronistic, the abhorred; and are shocked to realize, too late, that the majority of Nepalis are elsewhere.

There is no polite way to say this. It would greatly help Nepal if influential foreigners here would read, read, read—not just newspapers. Actual books. And if there aren't enough good books around, then support the intellectual ferment gathering force today: invest in new scholarships. ●

Which way now?

We have to know what our destination is

So far this week: the US ambassador goes on a fact-finding mission to mid-western Nepal in a US aircraft, King Gyanendra issues a set of directives to his appointed

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



government, the estranged Rana-Thapa factions of RPP patch up their differences, and the Nepali Congress' Girija Prasad Koirala surprises even his supporters by calling for a party reunion.

At first glance, these headline-hogging events look like they happened independent of each other. But on closer scrutiny, there seems to be thread running through them.

The government has admitted that there are about 50 US defence personnel in Nepal. Other sources claim it may be as high as 500 at any given time. Whatever the exact figure, and whether they are in uniform or not, there is little doubt about their real mission: to contain the insurgency.

Maoist leader Prachanda recently said, "The Royal Army has so far survived due to the economic, political and technical support of the Americans. That is why our party has been calling it Royal-American Army." No surprise, then, that the visits of American diplomats and brass to our domestic hotspots in their own aircraft has raised eyebrows and convinced many that the Americans are more deeply engaged with the Royal Nepali Army than either of them dare, or care, to admit.

The king has enough reasons to be smug. With the world's hyperpower supporting him, the political parties on the streets shouldn't be much of a worry. His 10-point directive for the development of the mid-western region could be precursors to more such missives from Narayanhiti Palace in future. More felicitations are planned in Gorkha and Pokhara.

But something has spooked Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, otherwise he would have no reason to suddenly mend fences with party president Pashupati Shumsher and reshuffle the cabinet. Does he hear bells tolling? The king is unlikely to carry an albatross of royal loyals from the RPP for much longer. A cabinet of ambitious independents would implement his instructions much more faithfully.

If and when elections are announced, they could be conducted by the cabinet of rootless politicians like Kirtinidhi Bista or other party renegades. The RPP will be asked to show its strength at the elections to reclaim the mantle of a proper royalist

party. This is the fear that has prompted Thapa's cabinet colleagues into packing the government with people they personally trust. Thapa's attempt to appoint handpicked officers into each ministry to look after the welfare of the RPP cadre was also motivated by a similar apprehension. The move was checkmated by mainstream political parties without the Narayanhiti strategists coming into the fray.

For his part, Koirala has been in politics too long not to realise the true significance of these seemingly unrelated developments. Students affiliated to Nepali Congress and its splinter faction were badly mauled by the front organisations of UML, and it provided him a convenient excuse to sell his message to the masses. By referring to the message from ex-Indian Prime Minister Chandra Sekhar, Koirala had already won over the line-up of permanent dissenters within his party. The invitation from Biratnagar was just a formality.

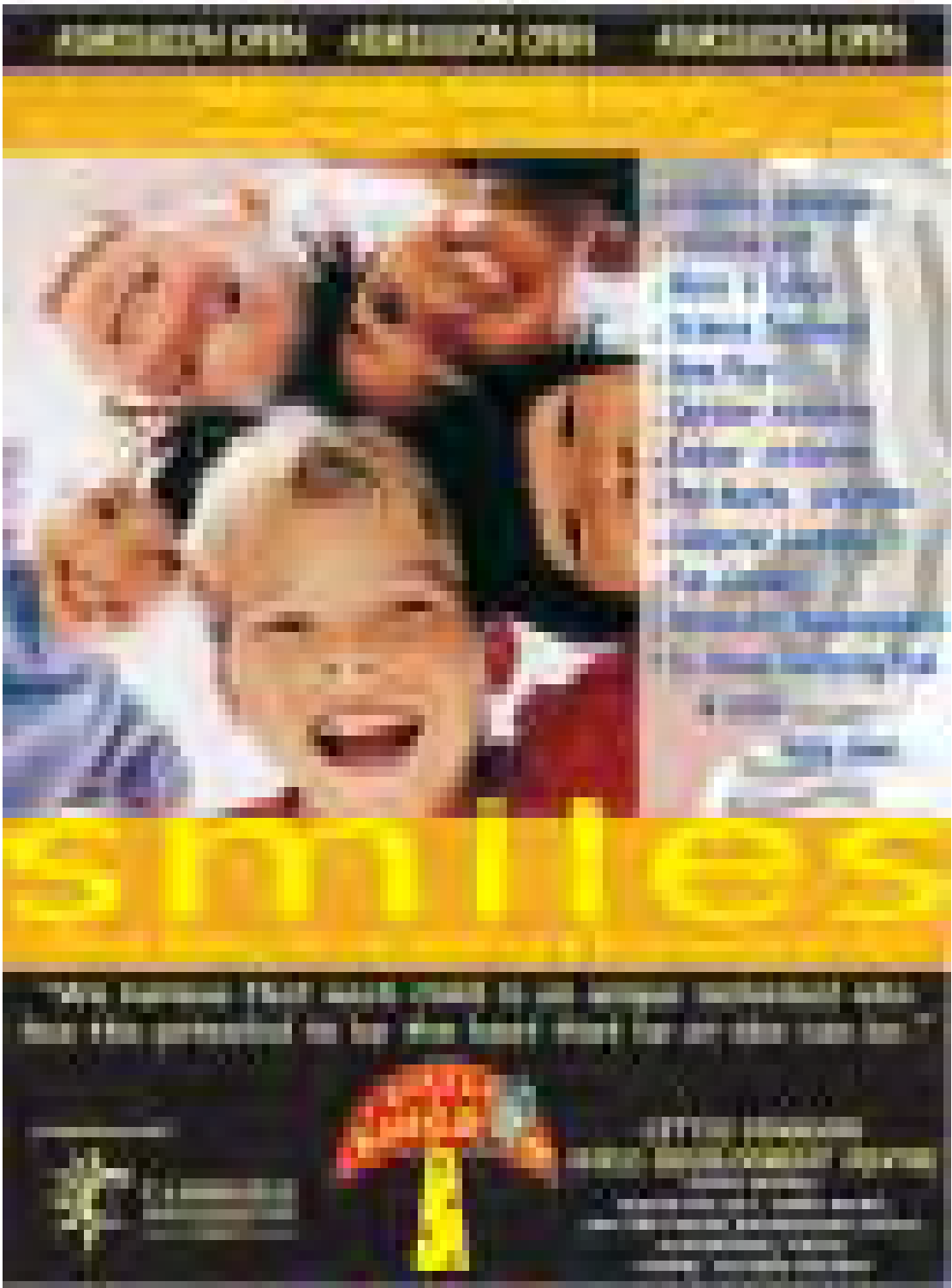
The more King Gyanendra asserts his power, the higher the need of a unified democratic force to keep him on his toes.



ROBIN SAYAMI

Narayanhiti Palace is more aware of the risks of unification of the Nepali Congress than its leaders are about the opportunities offered by such a possibility. The palace's political conspirators will do everything to keep Koirala and Deuba hangers-on squabbling.

the emergence of a political force powerful enough to challenge an activist king will depend on the strength of the public opinion in favour of democracy. Ultimately the people will have to show how much they value their rights. ●



How much aid for AIDS?

MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

For the past 15 years as the AIDS epidemic has spread in Nepal, donors, government and health activists have focused on prevention through public awareness about modes of infection.

But statistics like a recent survey that shows 90 percent of Nepalis are aware that condoms help prevent infection, but only 12 percent actually use them points to a big gap in changing public conduct.

As the unofficial estimate of the number of infected people in Nepal approaches the 80,000 mark, the issue of rehabilitation, care and cure have also become important.



Although AIDS is still officially a disease without cure, there are now anti-retroviral drugs (ARV) that allow patients with HIV to live longer by bolstering their immune systems. In combination with conventional drugs to treat opportunistic infections, ARVs can indefinitely prolong the life of an HIV patient as long as the treatment is not temporary.

Last month, the government announced amidst great media fanfare that it was beginning to treat

HIV patients with ARVs. The campaign was launched at the Sukraraj Tropical Infectious Disease Hospital in Teku with free ARV treatment for five patients who were paraded on stage. Activists who have been campaigning for access of treatment were angry that the patients were shown on television receiving their medications from Health Minister Kamal Thapa.

"It showed extreme insensitivity on the part of the government towards the plight of the patients," said one activist. "If this is how callous the government can be, we doubt if it is really committed to lifelong

treatment or whether it is prepared for the legal and ethical implications of an unsustainable ARV program."

The government's anti-AIDS strategy, unveiled two years ago, says ARV therapy is actually not feasible or affordable for Nepal. But there seems to have been a U-turn, and the government now says it is launching a pilot project to treat up to 25 patients with ARVs. The reason for the hurry seems to be to demonstrate that Nepal has the capacity to absorb the \$11 million

earmarked to fund ARVs in Nepal over the next five years from the \$15 billion Global Fund announced by US President George W Bush last year.

ARV treatment is very expensive, costing up to Rs 2,600 a month for the rest of the patient's life. Most Nepalis with HIV will never be able to afford it, and it is also beyond the government's budget capacity to provide the drugs to all HIV patients for life.

AIDS activist Rajiv Kafle, who is himself HIV positive, is critical of the government undertaking ARV treatment without first ensuring that treatment will be sustainable. "It is good news for us positive people that the government has started ARV therapy, but it will be a blunder if it is done without homework and the necessary commitment to provide the drugs to patients for their entire lives."

Shyam Sunuwar, 32, is a farmer from Sarlahi. He had been suffering from diarrhoea and fever for the past six months and came to Kathmandu for treatment. He was diagnosed HIV positive at Teku Hospital. Although he knew about HIV from radio, television and leaflets, he never felt it necessary to use protection while having physical relations with a woman he trusted. He fears his pregnant wife back home in Sarlahi may also be infected.

Now that the enormity of his situation has dawned on him, Shyam has been told by his doctor that he may only live six more years.

For now, the government is offering anti-retroviral therapy to 25 patients

He is torn by guilt and a sense of responsibility towards his wife, two daughters and a sister. ARV treatment would prolong Shyam's life, but he can't afford it and the government's therapy plans are restricted.

For the moment, as per WHO protocols, the government is only considering HIV patients with CD4 cell counts of less than 200 for ARV therapy. But cost of the treatment is only one of the issues. The government also has to ensure proper training of health staff for selecting patients, and there needs to be a well-organised infrastructure to take the drugs to the patients—many of whom may not even be visiting hospitals. The right people need to get the drugs in the right manner with a strong supporting network of health and social counseling. Follow-up clinics need to be set up with professionals.

"There must first be a concerted national policy to address the epidemic and a well-organised mechanism to deliver therapy," says Michael Hahn, country coordinator for UNAIDS in Nepal. The government has been promised help from the UN to support ARV therapy, mainly because as the epidemic grows there will be more and more HIV patients and the sooner the government can start more patients on ARV the better.

But for now, the government only has the resources to extend ARV therapy to 25 patients. "This is not just a medical issue, it has



impact on every sector of the economy and society, and the whole population is vulnerable, not just high risk groups like sex workers, their clients, injecting drug users or migrant workers," says Ram Prasad Shrestha at the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control.

The government wants to ensure that there are rehabilitation centers before it commits to medication. It also wants NGOs involved in the process. "Unless there is a joint effort of the community, donors and the government, we cannot make it a self-sustaining therapy," Shrestha adds.

At the Teku Hospital, nurses Nir Kamal Basnet and Bhagbati Shrestha are counselling patients who have come for ARV therapy. "We get at least ten patients every day from all over Nepal who have heard about ARV, we have to send them for the CD4 test, and then the committee will select them on the basis of their physical and economic condition," Basnet explains.

For now, it looks like the decision between life and death, and how much longer HIV infected people will live, which Nepali will get ARV therapy and who won't, will be decided by a committee. ●

You don't have to have 20-20 vision to spot Western hypocrisy, not in Nepal and not around the world. The latest example is Haiti.

Basically what has happened is this. The United States, France, Canada and a few other countries—all ostensibly democratic and committed to expanding democracy in other lands—backed an armed rebellion against an

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



elected leader. And they were

successful.

Make no mistake, what has happened in Haiti is nothing less than an internationally-backed coup. President Jean Bertrand Aristide was no angel. His administration was corrupt and incompetent. Its support was withering. But it was elected. Aristide was the first-ever elected President in Haiti, despite 200 years of proud independence as the world's first republic founded by black people.

He had a year-and-a-half left in his second term in office. If the motley opposition of rich people and American-educated rightwingers had been willing to wait, they might have seen Aristide humbled at the polls. They weren't. So under the auspices of the US Embassy in the Haitian capital, Port Au Prince, they came together and started to protest against Aristide. So far so good. Protest is okay. Opposition

Haiti's warning for Nepal

What we saw in Haiti was gunboat diplomacy in the name of democracy



parties are free in democracies to demonstrate against the government and to rally popular support.

What happened in Haiti was something different.

Instead of launching a nation-wide movement to force a change in government peacefully, the opposition leaders tacitly backed armed gangs of criminals who captured towns and cities. Haiti has no army and its police

force has only 4,000 officers, all poorly trained and underpaid. The rebel gangs were largely ex-army soldiers who'd kept their guns when Aristide disbanded the military in the 1990s.

It seems to me that the developed democracies, and Canada, France and the US are the big players in the neighbourhood here, and shouldn't be backing armed, drunken, violent thugs against an elected leader. However bad that leader was, surely the

interests of democracy are best served by democracy. Right? Wrong.

Washington, Paris and Ottawa used diplomatic pressure and threats of aid embargoes to force Aristide to flee from Haiti last weekend. The US basically told the Haitian president that he could leave the country in a aeroplane or a body bag. The Bush administration blocked attempts by Aristide to bolster his coterie of armed body guards.

This is 19th century Imperial-style gunboat diplomacy done in the name of democracy. What bugs me most is not the brutal force or coercion that's used in these situations; it's the mealy mouthed self-justification. We do it for peace, we do it for stability, we do it for—hold your breath—democracy.

If this sort of behaviour by the West is going to continue, and it will, perhaps Nepal should take note. Perhaps the democrats in this country, agitating against the king, could convince the West to support their cry for a republic. But don't count on it. As an American black community leader said the other day in Washington, "We're always on the wrong side in these things." ●



Volunteer army against AIDS

From east to west, young Nepali volunteers are on the frontline of the battle against AIDS

SRADDHA BASNYAT

In five years, AIDS will be the biggest killer of Nepalis in the 15-49 age group. One unofficial estimate puts the number of Nepalis with HIV at 80,000. Other estimates are higher.

AIDS is now no longer a risk limited to 'vulnerable groups'. Everyone is at risk because the virus has entered the general population. Communication is the first line of defence against this communicable disease, and since infections are spread by unsafe sex or sharing needles, there has to be awareness at all levels of society.

To start a new approach to communicating HIV and AIDS awareness, last week Save the Children UK presented 'Our Voice, Our Emotion: a photographic journey' documenting individual voices at the grassroots. The portraits, which capture the voices and emotions of volunteers in Achham and Jhapa who have been mobilising their communities in planning and implementing AIDS awareness activities, will be on display at Standard Chartered Bank branches across Nepal. Called Social Volunteers Against AIDS (SoVAA), these young men and women are involved in awareness campaigns, battling social stigma and discrimination, providing care and support to families with infected members.



Kabiram Joshi speaks to youth in Achham (top) and Neera Khadayat writes a letter for a woman in her village.

People in the remote mid-western district of Achham have traditionally migrated to India. Now, the insurgency has increased the number of people leaving. Neera Khadayat's brother was among those who left. While he was away, she saw villagers ostracise the family of a neighbour who died of AIDS, after coming home from Mumbai with the disease.

"I realised this could happen to my family too and the fire of pain started to burn," Neera recalls. She learned all she could from newspapers, radio and books and gradually gained her neighbour's trust. The 16-year-old then offered to write letters to family members in Mumbai, informing them about the nature of the disease, what it was doing to their society and how to be safe. Neera wrote to her brother as well. "Lack of knowledge is how it spreads, so that's why we write to our people there."

Kabiram Joshi, 22, witnessed first-hand society's brutality towards an HIV infected neighbour in an Achham village. "After he came back from Mumbai, I saw his neighbours and friends pull him from the car. He was bleeding but they didn't help him—I wondered why. I found out he was HIV positive." The incident motivated Kabiram to become a SoVAA. Kabiram has spent the past two years networking with 60 other volunteers to fight stigma and ostracisation of HIV

people. Already, he says he sees less discrimination: children from families with infected members play with others freely and funeral rites are accorded to AIDS victims. The men ask for a fresh blade at the barber's and disposable syringes for their vaccinations.

Ram Bharosha Kunwar watched people in his village dying from AIDS. "Our women became widows, children became orphans. I said this is enough, now I have to fight," says the 58-year-old teacher from Achham. As a volunteer, Ram knows awareness is the only true protection he can give his students. By grade three, he is already talking to students about AIDS.

AIDS is much less of a threat in Jhapa compared to Achham. Jasmine Rajbhandari, head of SC-UK's advocacy unit, says Jhapa is a more urbanised border area where the disease is not so prevalent yet. "But in a few years it could be, in a sense, another type of Achham," she warns.

The social mobilisation initiative targeted high risk youth because they have the motivation and the time to do something to make a difference. Anita Nepali is a dalit, and the 19-year-old has been a volunteer for the past three years dedicating all her free time from school and household chores to work with 12-24 year-old drug users, making them aware of the dangers of sharing needles. ●

US AIDS fund

Activists are dismayed by a Bush administration strategy on funds for anti-AIDS drugs

JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON DC

President George W Bush's new, five-year, \$15 billion strategy announced last week to fight the global HIV/AIDS pandemic has provoked dismay among health activists.

The 103-page document details the first disbursements totalling \$350 million, but details to clarify whether Washington will buy life-preserving, anti-AIDS drugs from generic producers, which are mostly made in poor countries such as India, Thailand and Brazil, as opposed to western brand name drugs that are generally more expensive, are absent.

Ambassador Randall Tobias is in charge of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is non-committal on the issue, stressing that brand producers have reduced their prices so much that the question is no longer particularly relevant.

"It's a go-slow, go-it-alone approach," noted Paul Zeitz, head of the Global AIDS Alliance (GAA). "And it's amazing that more than 13 months after the president announced the plan, only now is the first dollar being spent." Many activists are concerned the administration will buy only brand-name drugs. The fact that Tobias, former chairman and chief executive officer of pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, was chosen as the global AIDS czar, has enhanced those concerns.



Randall Tobias, former CEO of the pharmaceutical giant, Eli Lilly, has been appointed by President Bush to head the \$15 billion Global AIDS Fund.

Activists said key anti-retroviral drug treatments from brand companies were four times more expensive than comparable ones from generic manufacturers currently recommended by the WHO. "Tobias' assertions are factually untrue", said Zeitz who added that the strategy document is curiously silent about both debt relief for AIDS-affected countries and any follow-up on administration pledges two years ago to exempt certain life-saving medicines from intellectual property rights provisions in new trade agreements.

The strategy document, developed over the four months since Tobias was appointed, lays out how the administration intends to spend the \$15 billion dollars, which Bush first pledged 13 months ago, to be spent over five years. In a rare display of independence, Congress approved \$2.4 billion for 2004, and increased the fund's share to \$550 million. But under the strategy released Monday, Bush is proposing the US commit only \$1 billion to the Global Fund over the five years. He has again requested only \$200 million dollars.

The other \$14 billion, says the strategy paper, would be used for bilateral programs only—\$9 billion for programs in 14 African and Caribbean countries and another \$5 billion in ongoing bilateral programs, most administered by USAID, in more than 100 countries worldwide. The strategy says that in the 15 focus countries the \$9 billion will be used to provide treatment to two million people through 2008, prevent seven million new HIV infections and provide care to some 10 million people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, including AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children.

To many activists, what was most disappointing about the new strategy was how much time it had taken to put together. "Three million people have died waiting for a new bureaucracy to be set up at the State Department, while Bush denies the already existing Global AIDS Fund the cash needed to actually fight AIDS and save lives," said Paul Davis of Health GAP.

"The plan released today by the president is a vastly under funded initiative that favours corporate interest over public health and undermines multilateral efforts to fight the AIDS pandemic," said Sherry Ayres of Africa Action, another advocacy group. ● (IPS)

Charitraheen Cheli

Women declare independence

Charitraheen Cheli (The Women of Ill Repute) is an underground group of women aiming to 'rip apart the veils,' who meet regularly in Kathmandu and engage in all kinds of guff, from high-minded politics to raucous *pandherni* watertap gossip. At a recent meeting, they released a statement declaring their independence, which reads:

"With all respect to the women who have rebelled before us, the women who rebel alongside us, and the women who will rebel after us: we refuse to be good."

They say the word 'good' is treacherous because it usually upholds the patriarchal standards of our society, and add: "We rejoice in our ill repute. We refuse to limit ourselves to what patriarchy deems to be serious, worthy, right and correct for women to think, speak and do. We think, speak and do anything and everything that

we feel like, when we feel like, in

the way we feel like, led by the wishes of our independent minds and hearts and bodies."

The Chelis' 40-point declaration of independence states:

1. To have or not to have an agenda is our liberty. We take on agendas as we wish, without accepting the burdens that others would like to saddle us with.
2. We are underground because its fun down there. We are everywhere around you, on the streets, in your office and even in your home. You are being watched!!!
3. Our thoughts are utterly uncensored. We speak in soft, melodious tones, and also scream, shout, yell and roar. We laugh loud and often. We wail. We whistle, hum, sing. We speak freely. Nobody silences us.
4. We behave freely. We do not bow, scrape, or act tamed or humbled — unless we want to be, for our own purposes. We chew paan in public. We exchange blows when we need to. We buy contraceptives openly. We eat, drink and smoke anything, depending on our whims. We are the only ones who control our actions.
5. We wear combat boots, paint our toenails silver, have buzz-cut hair and wear leopard-spotted matching bra and panty—or no bra and panty at all. The clothes we wear, our shoes, our haircuts, our jewelry and makeup are all for our own comfort and pleasure.
6. We move about without restriction. We walk where women are not supposed to walk, leaving our homes, offices and neighborhoods far behind to enter spaces where we are not allowed, welcomed or expected.
7. We work in all professions, no matter how 'unwomanly'.
8. We redefine family roles so that they do not impinge on our individuality. Our identities are not based on our being the daughters of our fathers, the wives of our husbands, the sisters of our brothers or the mothers of our sons. We have individual identities of our own.
9. We may have breasts, vaginas, clitorises and wombs; we also have kidneys, livers, lungs, stomachs, hearts, pancreases, intestines, fingers and toes, nails, arms, legs, pubic-hair, skin, eyes, ears, mouth, lips and tongues. There are more similarities than differences between women and men. Most importantly, all people have independent minds, spirits and souls.
10. We have sovereignty over our bodies.
11. All children should be valued equally, and female fetuses should not be ultrasounded and discarded. Girls should receive the same care and opportunity as

On the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March, an underground Nepali women's group has issued a 40-point declaration



boys. No man should ever be called 'Raja'.

12. Boys and men must share in all household tasks. Men should be encouraged to stay home, cook, clean, look after children and change dirty diapers, while women work outside the home without any apologies. Also, we demand regular massages after a long day's work with no attached conditions.

13. We see menstruation as natural. We refused to be ashamed of it. Neither do we view women who have given birth as polluted. All women should be pampered and honored during menstruation and during pregnancy, childbirth and after. This will combat Nepal's shamefully high maternal mortality rate.

14. We demand easy access to cheap, safe and effective contraceptives and urge men to learn to love condoms.

15. We know we have the right to sexual pleasure, including, but not limited to, orgasm.

16. We reserve the right to choose sexual partners to fulfill our desires (regardless of class, caste, ethnic identity, nationality, religious belief, age or sexual orientation).

17. We also reserve the right to develop emotionally and intellectually fulfilling friendships with anyone we like.

18. We say no to advances that are not to our liking. We know that 'no' means 'no'. Do you know that 'no' means 'no'? If not, consult the dictionary.

19. Marriage does not license sexual misconduct or rape. Men: if a woman says she has a headache, she has a headache. Reach for a Cetamol, not a condom.

20. Incest and sexual exploitation of children is unacceptable. It must be exposed and punished. We should admire the courage of victims who come forward and support them.

21. Only pathetic losers harass girls and women. Harassment on the streets, in public vehicles, during festivals like Holi, in offices and workplaces and in the family are all unacceptable. Harassment, including seemingly innocent 'only teasing' makes us feel vulnerable. Then we get mad. Let's make

it illegal and publicly shame all perpetrators.

22. Which moron made the Civil Code? (And which morons have perpetuated its discrimination thus far?) We demand equal citizenship. Women should be able to pass along citizenship to their husbands and children. Our fatherless children, children we adopt, children born by artificial insemination, test-tube babies and off-springs of our frozen eggs and cloned genetic material should all be granted citizenship.

23. Which idiots would think women should have the permission of their fathers/ husbands/ guardians to obtain passports, or to travel and work abroad? (The same idiots who framed our Civil Code, that's who). Having reached the age of 18, we exercise the right for complete freedom of movement. Instead of curbing this freedom, the state should fulfill its obligation to provide women with protection, via consulates, in the foreign countries in which we travel, work and reside.

24. We refuse to return our share of our family inheritance to our brothers post-marriage. IT IS ALL OURS!

25. Single women should be legally allowed to adopt children.

26. We want girls and young women to pursue their studies without any hindrance, growing up to become mechanics, surgeons, editors, judges, electricians, mathematicians, diplomats, taxi drivers, woodworkers, priests and dhamis, etc.

27. Women's labour is as valuable as men's, and should be paid equally. Household work should be recognized as a form of labor. Labor laws created to help women, such as the provision of child care services and maternity leaves, should be made more practical.

28. We demand legal action against the traffickers of girls and women. Sex workers should never be arrested, only their pimps and brokers. Sex workers should be empowered to protect

themselves from all forms of monetary, social and psychological exploitation and sexually transmitted disease.

29. Men who commit violence against women are anti-national elements. Six out of ten of Nepal's sitting judges have said, in a widely-known study, that it is okay for men to slap around their wives to keep them in line. (Dear judges: shame, shame, puppy shame; all the donkeys know your name!)

30. Men with two or more wives must not enter public office. We shall judge men in public office on their private as well as public morality.

31. Dowries are a joke, and if you have given a dowry for your daughter's wedding, you are a joker. Ha, ha, ha!

32. We like women with power and express solidarity with *boksis* and *kichkannis*.

33. There should be no colour coding for widows. They should love and marry and have any kind of relationship they choose to have.

34. Women must have quick and easy access to social and legal justice, as well as clean indoor toilets.

35. Why only twenty percent? Half of all government jobs should be reserved for women. But equality and justice should be in practice, and not just in paper. Paper should be relegated to the above-mentioned clean indoor toilets.

36. We are not loyal to any political party if the party is not loyal to us. If you want our support, you'll have to work for us. Put women in half the leadership positions of all the political parties. But we only support women who have women-friendly politics. Not even women can take our support for granted. We are fed up with being used. Enough is enough.

37. We demand to have women in the post of prime minister, and as Ministers of Home Affairs, Finance; Foreign Affairs, Defense, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Tourism and Civil Aviation; Sports and Education, Water Resources and Physical Planning, Industry and Commerce, Science and Technology, Land Reform and Management; Information and Communication, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Population and Environment, Forest and Soil Conservation, Labour and Health. We also demand to have a woman Chief of the Army Staff.

38. We are tired of old ways of activism. Marching from Bhadrakali to Singha Darbar with a placard is mostly a waste of time. It is also polluting our lungs. We will use other means of exercising our politics, including non-violent guerilla tactics.

39. We do not hold double standards. We do not say one thing in public and practice something else in private. We speak the truth. Our characters are ISO 9002-certified!

40. We recognise that women are not a homogenous group and that there are differences of class, caste, ethnic identity, nationality, religion and sexual orientation between us. We respect and celebrate our differences and we pledge not to let elite women overshadow women who are less privileged.

In conclusion, patriarchy creates hierarchies. We reject all hierarchies.

There is no high and no low, no superior and inferior in our sisterhood of sovereign souls. We call for the support of all like-minded people in committing to taking action—big and small, public and private—to realise liberty, equality and camaraderie.

charitraheencheli@hotmail.com

A Koirala-Deuba patch-up is meaningless without wider debate on the purpose of such a reunion

Unity? What for?

Almost every party decries the politics of untouchability, yet they all practice it. The main opposition, UML, practiced untouchability in its ugliest form when it obstructed parliament for 57 days, and, not content with that, announced a social boycott of Prime Minister GP Koirala in 1999.

Then it was Koirala's turn, and he trudged along the UML's well-beaten path by treating Sher Bahadur Deuba as a political pariah until recently.

That is why Koirala's unity call last week from his hometown of Biratnagar for a general amnesty to all Deuba kangresis assumes significance far beyond a temporary patch-up. But unity, if it takes

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



place at all, will be meaningless without a wider debate on the purpose of such a reunion. Not only will they have to delve into the original reason the parent party split, but also critically analyse the role of the leaders.

The Congress split took place when Deuba, as prime minister, dissolved parliament without informing the party or Koirala, amidst growing mistrust and hostility between the two. Not only had the prime minister been instructed to withdraw an official resolution for the extension of the state of emergency tabled in parliament with the consent of the party chief, he had also been issued a show cause notice in the most humiliating manner by the party general secretary for

unspecified reasons.

Do the lapses by two leaders (dissolution without party's consent, or public humiliation of the prime minister by the party chief) deserve this amnesty? GP's call not only fully absolves himself and Sushil Koirala but also projects him as someone above party rules and norms of public office. For meaningful unity, he should step down and inspire Deuba and Sushil Koirala to follow the path of retroactive sacrifice. Secondly, this politics of unity should be the beginning of a process of reconciliation that discards the politics of untouchability in any shape or form. To prove they have done that, Koirala and Deuba, as well Nepal and the rest should sit with Surya Bahadur Thapa to find a way out of the current impasse. The country and democracy should not be forced off the edge by their

continued politics of boycott and untouchability any longer. If the unity between the two kangresi factions happens outside the ambit of the wider political context, it will just be another political farce.

Last month, Chandra Shekhar, a friend of many Nepali leaders who struggled for restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1991, met senior leaders like KP Bhattarai, Koirala and Deuba, and suggested that the Nepali congress unite and defend multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy. Koirala's unity call appears like a belated response, but he has not yet explained why he wants unity

now. Will the united party be supporting the call for republicanism or defend the present constitution, which has constitutional monarchy and the multiparty democracy as its salient features?

Political parties which do not pursue internal democracy cannot be real instruments of politics in a multiparty set-up. In order to make unity more meaningful, and a united party a vibrant political instrument, it should make its membership drive, internal electoral system and auditing transparent. The choice of candidates for parliament should be decided on the recommendation

of the district or constituency level committees.

The current political uncertainty did not suddenly appear out of the blue on Fourth October. It was the culmination of a series of factors triggered by the unmanageable rivalry and power tussles between Koirala and Deuba. The fact that Koirala and the UML did not ask for Deuba's reinstatement, only calling his dismissal as prime minister an "undemocratic and unconstitutional act" by the king, is sufficient evidence to throw their democratic credentials into doubt. The unity move, therefore, has to be an exercise of introspection and public pledge. The propagators of unity owe it to the people to explain to them how it will help to bring the constitutional process back on track. ●



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५० वर्षको लागि नेपालमा



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Friendly autocrats

It is in the US national interest to make the king restore democracy

The US State Department released its annual country reports on human rights practices last week. Few students of international politics still believe that the US changes its policies towards particular countries on the basis of their state of democracy and human rights. It is the national interest that reigns supreme and we don't have to go very far for examples.

In the 1980s, the fundamentalist Islamic government of Gen Zia-ul-Haq was the most trusted and reliable friend of America in its campaign against the Soviets in Afghanistan. In 1998, sanctions were imposed on India and Pakistan following their nuclear tests. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the US, President Bush declared sanctions were no longer in

LONDON EYE
Robin Raj



America's "national security interest". The US has often over-ridden democracy and human rights in pursuit of its national interest.

Having said that, democracy and human rights do feature prominently in US foreign policy. Since the idea of "democratic peace" (democracies don't fight each other) was promoted in the early 1980s, the successive American governments have given due prominence to democratisation and human rights. Only when the US administration feels that the American interests are served better through dictatorial regimes, as in the case of Saudi Arabia or Musharraf's Pakistan, does it speak duplicitous language. Or when it believes that the promotion of democracy and human rights serves the US national interest better in the long run.

In its Nepal report, the State Department blames the army and the Maoists for dismal human rights records. However, the report does not blame anyone for the most fundamental violation of human and democratic rights of the Nepalis as a nation: the right to choose their government, which has been taken away by the king.

Does this mean that the king's action has better served the American interest, hence the silence? We obviously can't expect the Americans to promote rights at the expense of their national interest. But how does the king's undemocratic regime do America any good? Washington must remember how the promotion of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan in the 1980s to fight the Soviets resulted in the emergence of the Taliban 20 years later. The support to Saddam Hussain during the Iraq-Iran conflict emboldened him to start subsequent adventures.

The Americans, and the West in general, have been visibly lenient about the royal takeover of executive powers. They don't seem to realise that the king's continuing rule has only helped extremists of the right and the left of the political spectrum. They should realise that unless constitutional institutions are strengthened, there is a possibility of human rights violations getting worse.

This is not, in any way, a call for coercive intrusion into the state's affairs. However, let's be open enough to understand that there are certain universal values like human rights and democracy, the violation of which, call for international pressure to stop it. Such pressures should not be considered as a violation of sovereignty, the definition of which, has changed drastically in this era of globalisation.

It may, therefore, be time for greater international pressure on the king to restore the democratic institutions as a first step towards resolving the country's political crisis. The irrational arrogance of sovereignty and fear of being labelled anti-nationalist in supporting international pressure for protection of human rights and democracy will do no good to our nation.

The silence of the State Department report on the fundamental violation of human and democratic rights of the Nepalis should be deplored, but there should be no hesitation to say that if the US and other Western governments want Nepal to stop from sliding into a failed state, they should be more vocal in pressuring the king to rectify his mistakes. Actions have to be taken in time. History has plenty of examples that delays can have dangerous consequences. ●

"We are scared."

from p1

A group of child rights organisations, National Coalition for Children as Zones of Peace, estimates that 500,000 children across Nepal are being deprived of primary education. At this rate, Nepal's achievements over the past 15 years in raising literacy, especially of girl children, is going to suffer a serious setback.

In a strongly-worded press statement issued in Kathmandu this week, the Coalition said: "We view with deep concern reports in the media that school-going children are also being targeted for conscription as combatants in the conflict. Children should never be recruited as combatants and never be used in any activity relating to armed conflict."

The statement adds: "It is a tragedy for our nation that teaching has become one of the most dangerous occupations in the

country. It is a tragedy that so many schools have closed, that so many teachers have been kidnapped, killed or have fled, and that the schools that remain open have continual interruptions due to bandas."

Some parents in the mid-west have had enough. Last month, in Rukum's Pipal village, a group of parents gathered up their courage to warn Maoists to stop political and military training of their children. "We told them that they were disrupting our children's studies," said one parent. The Maoists went ahead anyway with their two-day program at Pipal Secondary School.

In Rukum's Khalanga district headquarters, the Tribhuban Public High School is surrounded by barbed wire because the classrooms have been requisitioned by the army and turned into a barrack. The classes are still held inside what looks like an army base and even small children have to go through

security searches while entering their school. A school identity card costs Rs 50 and many can't afford it, and so can't go to school.

"We have asked the army repeatedly not to walk around with their weapons inside the school, but they don't listen," says one teacher, "the students are distracted and are afraid all the time." We asked the officer on duty why the army base had to be in the school, and he replied flatly: "It is for their own protection."

But it is clear that for both the Maoists and the army, their own security is more important than the security of the civilians, and keeping out of schools doesn't seem to be a priority. "We are really surprised with their attitude, neither side seems to think education is important," says Navaraj Gautam, vice principal of a high school in Musikot who is worried students will just drop out. Says one student in Musikot: "It's scary seeing all those guns, we are always afraid something will happen to us." ●



Children as zones of war

The Maoists don't seem to be too worried about concerns raised by human rights groups about recruitment of children. They haven't even bothered to deny the army's allegations that hundreds of children and teachers have been abducted from villages in Rolpa and Achham districts in the past month. In fact, Kamala Shahi of the Maoist-aligned student union admitted this week that a child militia was being set up after five school children were killed in an army attack at the Sharada Secondary School in Doti in December. "The child militia will soon be 50,000 strong," Shahi boasted this week. Several dozen students from Jangariti School in Jugar in Rolpa who were forcibly taken away recently were sent back after a weeklong participation in a Maoist program. And there are reports of young children being found

abandoned and lost after being taken away by Maoists.

Even so, there is no direct evidence that children are getting arms training. Even the army admits its information is based on secondary sources. "We don't have evidence or witnesses of Maoists training children to use arms," says human rights activist Dhana Shyam Acharya from Rolpa. Pro-Maoist student and coordinator for Seti-Mahakali, Ramesh Matal, admitted children were being taken in, but said they were only receiving *janabadi sikska* and were taken on "educational tours" of Maoist base areas. But one Rolpali villager, who is now a refugee in Nepalganj, told us he has seen armed children below 18 patrolling his village and is convinced: "Their ultimate aim is to build a children's army." ●

(Netra KC in Nepalgunj)

BIZ NEWS

Ultimate pilgrimage

Nepal Tourism Board along with private sector participated in the Travel Trade Fair (TTF)-Bangalore from 24-26 February to project Nepal as an 'Ultimate Pilgrimage and Adventure Destination' aiming for the Indian market that generates one-third of the tourists coming to Nepal. Nepal's Pashupati Darshan Package with a visit to Pashupati, launched earlier in Chennai by His Holy Highness Sri Jagadguru Shankaracharya, was a big attraction. The parallel theme of projecting Nepal as an adventure destination served to attract the younger generation. With Royal Nepal Airlines' direct flights from Kathmandu to Bangalore, it could be a potential tourist hub for promoting Nepal's tourism to Chennai and other parts of south India. That is if Royal Nepal Airlines can make that flight regular, tour operators add.

Launching Manang

The travel program Destination Manang will be inaugurated on 22 March. Organised by the Manang Youth Society, the ceremony will take place in Chame, headquarters of Manang district, with the primary objective of introducing Manang to those seeking a once-in-a-lifetime adventure and a unique cultural experience. Manang Youth Society will float a special package for Destination Manang-2004 for Nepalis and foreigners. www.destinationmanang.com

Tourism tricks

Provided all goes well, Nepal will soon have a new tourism policy based on the suggestions the government is canvassing from many sectors of the industry. Various associations of tourism entrepreneurs have already submitted their input.

“Given the changed national and international scenario, we need to have a new policy,” Rabi Jung Pandey of the Tourism for Rural Poverty



Alleviation Program told us. "New concepts that are picking up, like domestic tourism, will have to be included in the new policy."

Some quarters in the travel industry want issues like categorisation of travel and tour operators, standardisation of services and quality control,

among others, to be included in the new policy, while others have been opposing it.

The list of what tourism entrepreneurs want and what they don't may go on and on. But the key challenge, tourism pundits say, is to maximise the contribution of tourism industry in the national economy with due attention to sustainability. So far, tourism has been contributing a meager 0.3 percent to the GDP. "We will first go through the suggestions of all the stakeholders and hold a national level workshop for the final draft of the policy," an official at the Tourism Ministry said.

Tourism arrivals grew by 44 percent last month compared to figures for the same month in 2003, bringing visitor totals up to a total of 24,456.

NEW PRODUCTS

RUGGED: Mahindra is introducing two new models of “tougher than the toughest vehicles” to the Nepali market. Both claim to be comfortable with low maintenance costs, easy maneuverability and high ground clearance. The Mahindra Bolero Camper Single Cab is priced at Rs 935,000 (or 995,000 for the 4-wheel drive version). The Mahindra Maxx Pick Up is Rs 935,000 as well.



On 23 February, Nepal and India signed an agreement to promote direct bus services between the two countries. This meant that Nepali long-distance buses are now able to take passengers to India without much red tape, while Indian buses can bring in

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari



travellers to Nepal. The Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) and Nepal Association of Tour Operators (NATA) welcomed the agreement, saying that it makes it easier to bring in more tourists, but the Federation of Nepali Transport Entrepreneurs (FNTE) protested against it on grounds of patriotism, among other reasons.

It's easy to understand why HAN and NATA would support the agreement, but what could explain the FNTE's mindset?

As a child in the late 70s and early 80s, I fondly remember listening to commercial jingles for various long-distance bus companies on the one and only entertainment station at the time — Radio Nepal. The major arterial highways had just opened, linking Kathmandu to parts of eastern and mid-western Nepal. The good roads made it easier for buses to run day and night.

Seeing opportunities to make money, Nepali entrepreneurs, with permission from the Panchayat government, started transport companies. Soon these private sector companies were jostling with one another on the radio to claim how much 'comfort' their buses gave passengers. To attract customers, they added to the competition by offering 'cabin coach', 'video movies', 'deluxe seats' and other

Busing blues



Wriggling out of the clutches of cartels

services. Indeed, the jingles (especially the one of Kankai Mai Yatayat for early-morning buses leaving for Kakadbhitta from Kathmandu) were catchy and fun, patterned as they were after memorable Nepali folk songs. Besides amusement, the jingles gave one a sense of the kind of fierce market-based competition that the bus companies were then engaged in.

This sort of competition went on till the early 90s, after which owners of bus companies, with ties to unions affiliated with political parties, got together to form regional and national federations to protect their own interests.

With entities such as FNTE eventually holding sway, this led to the inevitable for the bus companies: no need to compete with one another as aggressively as before. The catchy tunes on the radio stopped, there was widespread price-fixing, bad service and fewer choices for most passengers. Bus owners emerged as a minor political force that could call on and off *chakka-jams* in any road-linked part of the country. The result? A comfortable cartel that has been chugging along with the best of all worlds: political patronage, almost no market pressure and guaranteed profits.

Used to operating out of such a cocoon, it is no wonder that the Indo-Nepal agreement would make the FNTE members nervous. With the agreement in place, Indian bus operators need not play by FNTE's inward-looking and cartel-friendly rules. To make money, most likely, they will offer different service packages and wider choices that appeal to both Nepali and Indian customers interested in visiting either country.

Sooner or later, their operating to and from Nepal will also force us to deal seriously with issues of adulterated petrol, the needless traffic-related deaths and destruction that occur all too often on our highways and how transport-related services (auto repair, insurance, advertising etc) are bought and sold in the marketplace. The FNTE members can bury their heads in the sand and continue to shout for protection by launching chakka-jams. Or they can wisely accept the change as an opportunity to improve business and access new markets in India and Nepal.

Let's hope that they take the latter route by first ungluing themselves from FNTE (which has now outlived its usefulness) to put out even catchier, more competitive jingles on the radio. ●

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Maoist commander 'Pasang' addresses the inauguration of the 'Magarant Autonomous Region' in thawang on 9 January.

Torn asunder

NARENDRA KC

SHARAD KC

The Maoists are playing dangerous ethnic games to keep up the momentum of their revolution

There are examples of revolutions through history that start as freedom struggles, but soon degenerate into religious, ethnic or separatist wars. The nine-year-old Maoist 'People's War' could be headed the same way. The slew of ethnic and regional autonomous regions that the Maoists have launched in recent months makes this a legitimate concern.

According to its directive on autonomous regions released last year, the Maoists have, in addition to the central government, decided to set up seven ethnic and two regional autonomous regions (see map). Within these regions there are several tiers of district and town-village local government units with their own 'people's assemblies'.

However, it does not look like the selection procedures for who gets to be in these assemblies is going to be done under democratic principles of adult franchise. There are provisions to ensure that at every level of government there will be more nominated members than elected ones. For example, each village assembly will have 45 elected members from the wards and more than 55 will be nominated members from the Maoist army, the militia, marginalised and minority groups, intellectuals and businessmen.

The present series of announcements of autonomous regions started with the declaration of autonomy for the Magarant Region in Rolpa's Thawang on 9 January. Within two weeks, the Maoists had declared

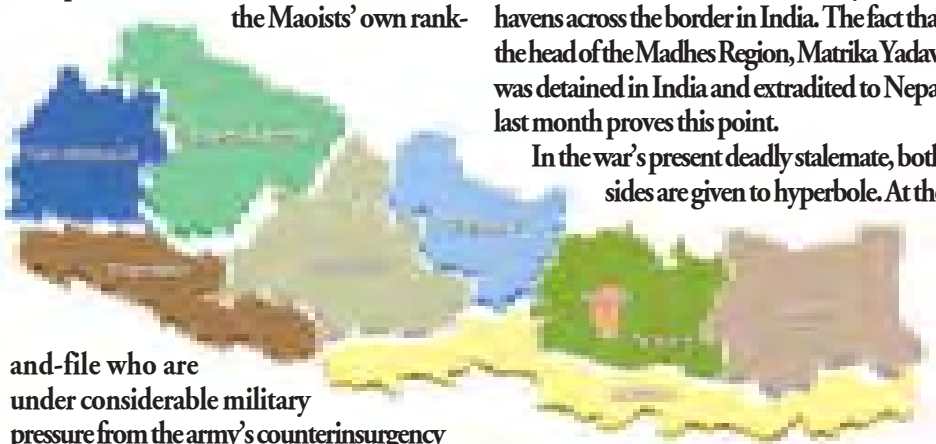
the Tamsaling Autonomous Region for the Tamangs, Bheri-Karnali Region, the Madhes Region, the Tharuwan Region, the Seti-Mahakali, Tambuwan and Kirant Autonomous Regions. They have left the declaration of the Newar Region in the capital for a later date.

There are several theories about why this sudden flurry of autonomous declarations. The most plausible seems to be a morale booster for the Maoists' own rank-

legitimate 'tax'. After all, the Maoists haven't really been doing much development even in the base areas that are under their control. In fact, the education and health care systems, rudimentary as they may be, are still being paid for by the 'old regime'.

In terms of security, it is hardly possible for the Maoists to ensure security for the people in their autonomous regions when they are not secure themselves and need to rely on safe havens across the border in India. The fact that the head of the Madhes Region, Matrika Yadav, was detained in India and extradited to Nepal last month proves this point.

In the war's present deadly stalemate, both sides are given to hyperbole. At the



and-file who are under considerable military pressure from the army's counterinsurgency operations and must be thinking there may be no end to the fighting.

Indeed, besides making declarations amidst large public gatherings, there hasn't been much by way of an administrative structure to maintain these autonomous regions. The declaration of regional political units of government could also be one way that the Maoists can convert the revenue they presently collect from extortion or forced donations into

launch of the Magarant Region, its chairman Santosh Buda declared the airspace over his autonomous region "out of bounds" for the royal army. A few days later, King Gyanendra and the Chief of Army Staff, Pyar Jung Thapa, crisscrossed the midwest by air visiting the towns in Maoist strongholds. The government's writ may not go beyond the district headquarters, but there is really nothing to stop the army from flying in wherever it

wants to, as it did in Kalikot to flush out Maoists from the airfield in Kotbara last month.

"You don't get an autonomous region by just announcing it, they are being immature about it," says former guerrilla and leftist leader, CP Mainali. Other intellectuals and political leaders have criticised the autonomous region announcements, saying it may fragment the country. Lawyer Sindhunath Pyakurel says: "It would have been better to push for true political devolution at the regional level." Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara has argued, a bit unconvincingly, that ethnic and regional autonomy will actually strengthen the country's unity.

Shyam Shrestha, editor of the leftist magazine Mulyankan, says: "It's not clear whether autonomy also means the right to secede. If it does, then it's not right." The Maoist have received the bitterest criticism for their Kirant Autonomous Region in the east where a chauvinistic politician, Gopal Khambu, was made the chief instead of the popular activist, Bhaktaraj Khandangba.

All this has made the political parties nervous about the Maoist's real intentions, despite Prachanda having tried to take a softer approach by his statement on 26 January in which he said his party could "accept multiparty competition...and the role of the United Nations mediation and monitoring in any means to peacefully gauge public opinion..." And as usual, the Maoist leadership has been sending out contradictory messages. Soon after Prachanda's statement, the head of the Bheri-Karnali Region, Khadga Biswokarma, proclaimed that those who did not agree with the party line were banned from his newly autonomous region.

Mahara has tried to gloss things over, saying: "We are in a war situation. It won't always be like this." But, asks CP Mainali: "When protesters burn an effigy of the king, they are not shot at. Why should Ganesh Chiluwal be shot dead for burning the effigies of Baburam and Prachanda?"

The Maoist decision to go ahead with the autonomous region declarations appears to have been brought forward as a damage control measure to neutralise the group's public image as being ruthless, brutal and murderous. It could be intended to show that besides its military activities, the Maoists are also a political force with their own political agenda. "It may also be a show of political and military strength," explains Shyam Shrestha.

In the final analysis, the Maoists may also be finding it difficult to gain new recruits solely on political slogans of a class war. Maybe they need something more potent, like ethnic self-determination, to ignite populist passions. The Maoists are already being accused of using autonomy as an excuse to foment ethnic tensions. ●



MOHAN MAINALI

Daughters sue their dads

MAYA SHARMA in NEPALGANJ

Following the 11th amendment to the civil code two years ago, an increasing number of daughters have knocked on doors of the court system to claim their share of paternal property.

Before the amendment, only those unmarried at 35 had inheritance rights. Now that the law has been changed, more and more daughters are filing cases against their fathers to claim the property which is otherwise inherited by sons.

Shanti Ajad, 19, and Sanjay Ajad, 21, of Nepalgunj in Banke district have taken their father to court. Their mother could not produce a son, so their father remarried and became the proud father of a son and three other daughters, while the two sisters from the previous marriage were neglected. "Since we are regarded as a burden, we filed a case in the court for the paternal property," says Shanti. The court is considering the case.

Before the amendment of the civil code, the Ajad sisters would not even have been able to file the case. The two decided to go to court as soon as the amendment went into effect last year.

Sabare Bano is another daughter who is waging a legal battle

against her father for paternal property. She says she really didn't have a choice but to go to court because her father married for a second time and abandoned her and her mother. "I was not given anything to eat, forget about going to school," she says. Khan is confident that she will win the case because she has already submitted what she calls proof to the court.

Even daughters who are still minors are suing their daddies. Nine-year-old Ratna Kumari Brijbase has filed a case in the district court of Banke. She doesn't know what it is all about, but her brothers have reportedly made her one of the defendants in the case against their parents who started selling off all their family property.

The Banke district court has around half-a-dozen cases in which daughters have claimed their share of paternal properties. The court hasn't given a verdict on any of them yet, but more and more new cases are being registered. ●

(Mahila Bolchhin)

NEPALI
Times

MUSIC FOR PEACE



Jazzing it up in 'Mandu

Over the past few years, Kathmandu has gained a growing reputation as being a jazz-friendly valley.

Since the first Jazzmandu in March 2002, the festival is now an established stop on the international jazz calendar with music, participation and arrangement that is world class. Event management company Upstairs Ideas first envisioned the festival after the experience of the local ensemble, Cadenza, at the 2000 Palmer Street Jazz Festival in Australia.

Despite the fact that a musical event of this magnitude had never been attempted in Nepal before, through a sheer commitment to the music, the organisers managed to pull off an event that set the festival's reputation of high-caliber jazz, quality sound and an enthusiastic audience.

The appearance of Australia's leading jazz musician Don Borrows, and the ability to attract international jazz superstars has been another plus point. Word spread, and over 2,500 people turned up at the second festival in March 2003 to see acts such as Jesse Van Ruller, Afro Dizzi Act and master percussionist Trilok Gurtu. With a continuing emphasis on quality sounds and experienced musicians, the festival created a buzz in Kathmandu and around the world.

The third annual Kathmandu Jazz Festival, kicking off March 11, 2004, has peace as its main theme. And the lineup includes six international bands and three with a homegrown flavour. The headliner for the event is Louis Banks Brotherhood from Mumbai. The other international bands are Urban Connection from Norway, Simak Dialog from Indonesia, Hannah Vasanth Trio from England, Max Lolo from Benin, Africa, and Soul Mate from Shillong, India. This year's Jazzmandu includes a free show for school students, workshops and a peace parade.



Cadenza and Friends



What they can do in JAZZMANDU

Three Nepali ensembles will be playing at the Jazzmandu Festival next week, let's introduce them to you

Cadenza and Friends

Kathmandu's resident ensemble, Cadenza, is not only the moving force behind Nepal's jazz scene but has also helped propel the country into international jazz stardom.

It all started when Cadenza was performing at the Palmer Street Festival in Australia in 2000 and they wondered why Kathmandu couldn't have a similar gig. Jazzmandu was born: our very own annual international jazz festival.

When he dropped in unexpectedly at the Upstairs Jazz Bar in Lazimpat last year, music superstar Sting noted, "Any band is only as good as its drummer and this one is surprisingly good." He was speaking of the man behind it all: frontman Navin Chhettri, who is also the band's vocalist.

Cadenza's roots go back to the mid-1990s when Navin and his friends were struggling to get gigs at various Thamel bars. Often, passers-by would jam with Navin and turn out to be superb players, and that's how he began to discover jazz. To keep the band alive, Navin convinced friends Laxmi Raj Thapa (Chi) and Jigme Dorjee Sherpa who were playing

garage in Darjeeling to join him in Kathmandu.

A decade and two Jazzmandus later, Cadenza is grooving on Wednesdays and Saturdays at the Upstairs Jazz Bar where they have been known to pack it in even on a mid-week jam. With just enough room to chill—but probably not to lounge with legs extended—the cosy den is the cradle of jazz in the Valley.

At this year's Jazzmandu, Cadenza will take the stage as a 7-member group. Original members Jigme on the guitar and Chi on the bass both think of the festival as a chance to see how far they've come since last year and to learn more. Says Jigme, "It's like Dasai for jazz musicians." Chi adds, "There's no jazz school here so it's

a great chance to see different styles." Young and talented Gaurab Raj Pandey, a former student of Navin's, will also be returning on the keyboard. Newcomers include drummer Siddhant Thapa, another of Navin's students, on congas and percussion. Peter Kroutil on the clarinet, saxophone and flute hails from the Czech Republic. As a working musician, Peter has bagged several awards in his homeland and admits, "I never expected anything like this in Nepal in terms of quality of music when I arrived." The youngest addition is James Lhalungpa on the tenor saxophone, which he is learning in high school. The 16-year-old prodigy has been playing for five years.



Samundra Band

Samundra

This year will see the return of another homegrown musical product, Samundra. A union of five gandharbas they will add a traditional touch to the event. Bandleader Sanu Kancha Gandharba is clear that his group has its own traditional style. And just to be sure, they're coming with sarangis and classical raags their great grandfathers played.

On an invite from a Japanese student who fell in love with the sarangi while studying in Nepal, the quintet is preparing for a tour in Japan after the release of their latest album, titled Samundra Band, which is available in two parts. It's a huge accomplishment for all five members of Samundra, especially since Buddha Gandharba, Ram Krishna Gandharba, Samsher Gandharba and Arjun Gandharba, all in their thirties, have mastered the art of the sarangi but have no formal education. "It's not in our culture," explains Sanu Kancha. Kathmandu's music lovers who missed or didn't get enough of their music in the recent Gandharba Festival will have another chance to listen and dance to this quintessentially Nepali folk music at Jazzmandu.

Sanu Kancha runs the Gandharba Culture and Art Organisation in Thamel. He hopes to keep the gandharba

traditions alive and popular, and help educate the musicians at the same time. They are a self supported organisation, carving sarangis and selling them to tourists to raise funds and teaching the sarangi.

Prustaar

They have instruments we've all seen before: madal, bamboo flute, sarangi, tababla and santoor. But Hom Nath Upadhyaya and his 6-member group Prustaar throw together classical raags and folk tunes, producing a very precise rhythmic variety that he simply terms "fusion".

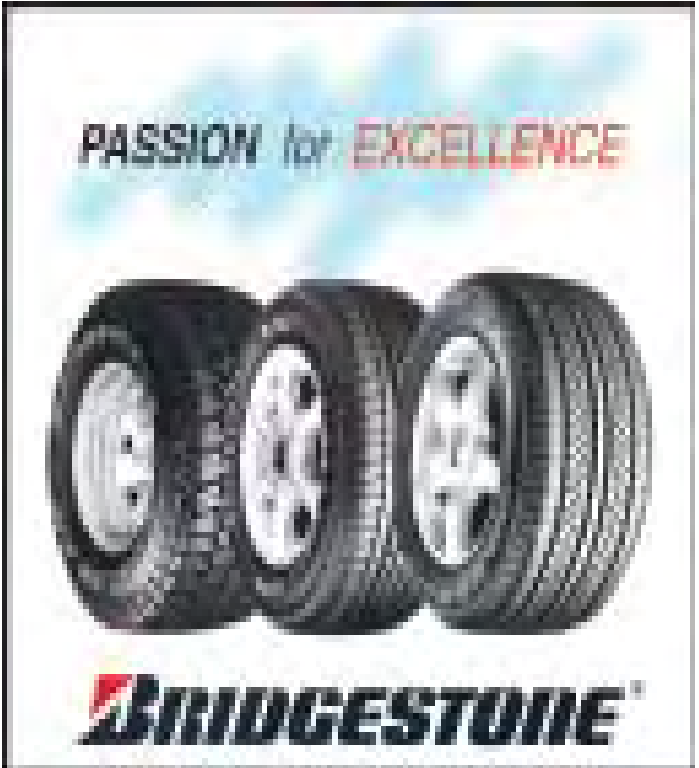
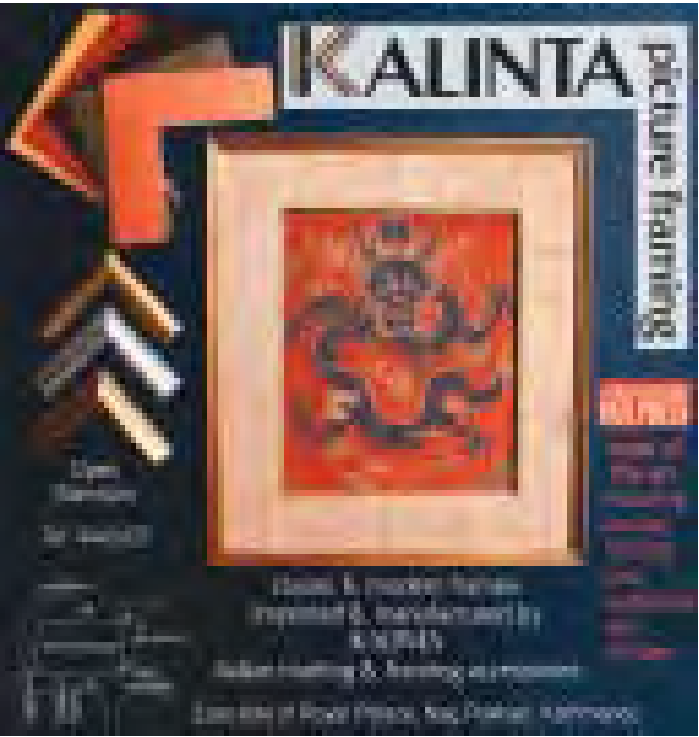
The music is the result of Hom Nath's labour of love: the music he composes comes from the rare collection of raags and folk tunes he has accumulated over 15 years of exploring and research. "The inspiration came from Pandit Nararaj Dhakal who told me to mix raag and folk," explains Hom Nath. It has worked out perfectly. During his many years as a teacher at Tribhuban University Fine Arts Campus he wanted to offer something new and refreshing to the students. They developed a technique where the band begins with a classical song, then things pick up with a Nepali song or rhythm and then finish with something fast.

Since 1998 Upadhyaya has

been dividing his time between teaching tabala and madal at the University of California in Santa Barbara and Kathmandu where he is involved in many music projects. He is president of Pasupatinath Music and Art Academy which holds devotional song sessions twice a month and an annual Shivaratri event. Upadhyaya's duties include encouraging sponsors to help artists. He is also working on publishing *Kashi to Kantipur* in English, a history of tabala music in Nepal.

"King Surendra Bikram Shah brought a tabala player from Banaras for the palace. The tabala player's sons and grandsons also played and generations followed creating their own style, very different from the Banarasi, which became our Nepali style."

The most exciting parts of being home for Upadhyaya and the band is Jazzmandu. They performed at both previous events. "Jazzmandu is an event that gives a lot of inspiration to Nepali artists. From East to West, all come together and make one family. That's our goal too, and it's working out very well." As an afterthought, Upadhyaya adds: "A lot of good has happened in all styles of music here. And most amazingly, it's without government support. There's so much talent in our Nepali artists." ●



Jazzmandu PROGRAM



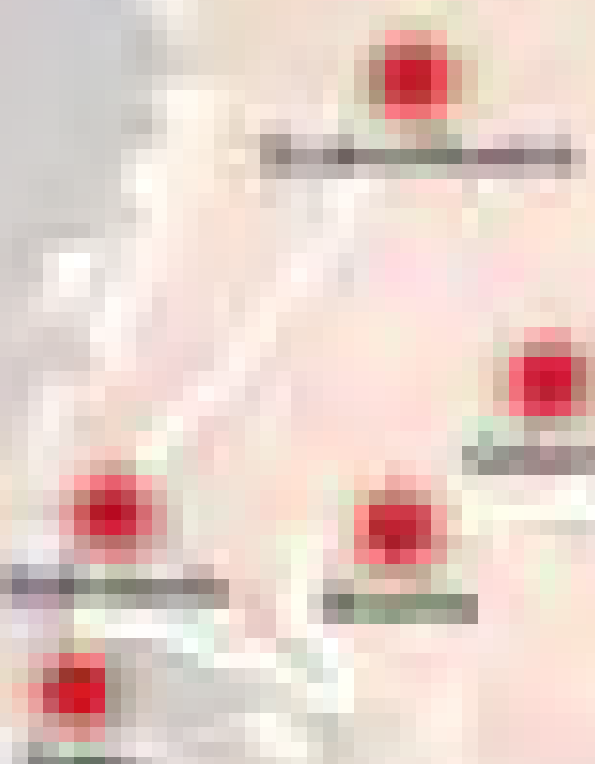
Thursday – 11 March
Jazzmandu Free show
Venue : Patan square, Patan
Time : 4:30 PM onwards
Performing : Urban Connection Live

Friday – 12 March
Jazzmandu Work Shop
Venue : Elites Co-ed School, Nagpokhari
Time : 4:30 - 5:30 PM
Entry : Invitations from Elites School or the Upstairs Jazz Bar available on a first come, first served basis
Instruments: Drums, Guitar, Saxophone, Keyboard

Friday – 12 March
Valley Jam
Venue : Shangri-La Jazz Bar, Lazimpat
Time : 7:30 - 10PM
Entry : Tickets Rs 350
Performing : Urban Connection

Saturday – 13 March
Jazz Bazaar
Venue : Gokarna Forest
Time : 4PM onwards
 [Gates open at 2PM]
Entry : Tickets Rs 599
Performing : Urban Connection, Max Lolo, Simak Dialog, Cadenza & Friends, Cadenza with Peter, MIK, Prastar, Gandharva, Nepali exotic cultural dances

Sunday – 14 March
Jazzmandu Peace Parade
Venue : Lazimpat
Time : 1 - 2PM



Sunday – 14 March
Jazzmandu Work Shop.
Venue : Elites Co-ed, Nagpokhari
Time : 4:30 - 6:30 PM
Entry : Invitations from Elites School or the Upstairs Jazz Bar available on a first come, first served basis
Instruments: Drums, Guitar, Saxophone, Keyboard

Tuesday – 16 March
Jazz for school students
Venue : Budhanilkantha School, Narayanthan
Time : 4:30 - 6:30 PM
Entry : Only on invitation
Performing : Max Lolo, Simak Dialog, Cadenza with Peter, MIK, Soul Mate



Wednesday – 17 March
Sounds of Africa - Max Lolo and Cadenza
Venue : Yak & Yeti Hotel, Kingsway
Time : 7PM onwards
Entry : Tickets Rs 1399, including food and drinks

Saturday – 20 March
Jazz Uncorked
Venue : Shangri-La Village, Pokhara
Time : 6.30 - 10PM
Entry : Tickets at Rs 999 with Dinner
Performing : Hannah Vasant Trio, Max Lolo, Cadenza with Peter, Soul Mate

Wednesday – 24 March
Jazz at Patan
Venue : Patan Museum Square,Patan
Time : 6 - 9PM
Entry : Tickets Rs 1149

Friday – 26 March
Supper Club – Headliner
Venue : Hyatt Regency, Boudha
Time : 7:30 PM to 11PM
Entry : Tickets Rs 2999, including dinner and Seagram's selected drinks
Performing : Louis Banks Brotherhood

Saturday – 27 March
Jazzmandu All Star Fever
Venue : Hotel Summit, Kupondole
Time : 6PM onwards
Entry : Tickets Rs. 699

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How to Write a Press Release
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The Power to Persuade: Presentations Skills with Microsoft PowerPoint
1 - 2 April (one-day course) (venue: room 7, 1st floor)

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Disappearing science

Why are the social sciences so much more at risk of having their budgets cut than the other two great bodies of academic knowledge, the humanities and the natural sciences? Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher notoriously proposed that the field simply

does not exist: there is

no such thing as society, she claimed. Others point to the restructuring of university social science departments. But the expansion of business schools arguably testifies to the continued vitality of the social sciences.

Nor is it true that the social sciences belabour the obvious, as is sometimes said. On the contrary, today's commonplaces were yesterday's innovations. If you compare the concepts used to frame newspaper editorials today and 10 or more years ago, you will find the deep—but unacknowledged—impact of the social sciences. The influence may be regretted, but at least it is registered.

Still, where are the social sciences in the vast conversation over “human nature” that has been prompted by recent advances in cognitive neuroscience, behavioral genetics and evolutionary psychology? Check out the elaborate and informative website (www.edge.org) devoted to the promotion of a “third culture” that bridges the humanities and the natural sciences. Social scientists are conspicuous by their absence.

But what difference would their presence make? It is often assumed that everyone recoils at the prospect that there are genetic limits to our capacity for change. Actually, only those imbued with the optimistic spirit of social science recoil. Everyone else is relieved.

In the “third culture” best seller *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Steven Pinker says that we may need to admit a natural scientific basis for

what humanists have for centuries called “fate”. In other words, the configuration of our brains and genes may ultimately be out of our control, however deeply we come to understand them. Pinker's message will appeal to those eager to avoid political reforms that would compel a greater sense of collective responsibility. After all, the social sciences historically offered empirical support and spiritual hope for just such reforms, which are increasingly dismissed as “utopian”.

By contrast, the humanities and the natural sciences share a sense of reality that transcends time and place; hence their common interest in a fixed “human nature”. This is tied to a way of thinking and a sense of knowing that is largely contemplative and sometimes even disempowering, as reality comes to seem to be whatever resists our concerted efforts at change.

These two great academic cultures also prefer to study humanity without having to mingle with flesh-and-blood human beings. Thus, evolutionary psychologists infer what makes us who we are from the remains of our Stone Age ancestors (including their DNA), whereas humanists focus on artifacts of a more recent and literate age.

In contrast, the social sciences adhere to the maxim that the best way to study humans is to interact with them, typically by getting them to do and say things that they might otherwise not. This profoundly simple idea, common to experiments and ethnographies, inspired the triumphs and disasters that punctuate modern politics. It requires an increasingly controversial assumption: all human beings—whatever their achievements, competences, status or health—are equally significant members of society, whose strength ultimately lies in what they can do together.

The social sciences' egalitarianism runs counter to both the humanist fixation on elite “classic” texts and the natural scientific tendency to generalise across species. Thus,

Social sciences are being stonewalled in the vast conversation of “human nature”



social scientists made the everyday lives of ordinary people respectable, while refusing to privilege certain animals over certain—typically disabled or unwanted—humans. “Welfare” occupies a pride of place in the social sciences that humanists and natural scientists replace with “survival” and maybe even “fortune”.

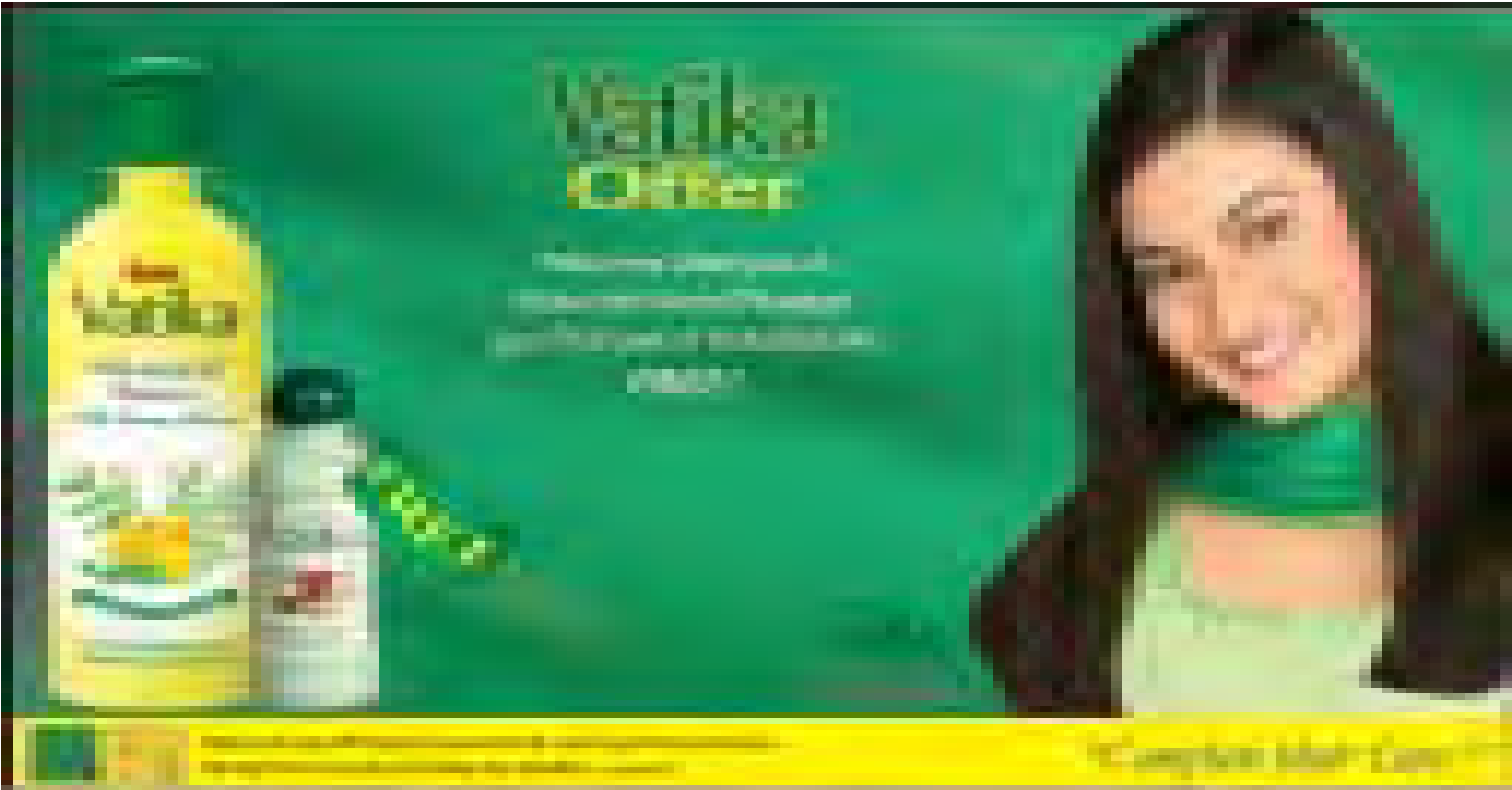
To be sure, the checkered history of welfare in the 20th century put the future of the social sciences in doubt. But a way forward can be found in TH Huxley, Darwin's fabled public defender. A late convert to evolution, he was a lifelong skeptic about the theory's political implications. For Huxley, civilised society rose above nature by its systematic resistance

to natural selection. In his words, the human condition is not about “survival of the fittest” but “the fitting of as many as can survive”.

Huxley identified humanity's achievements with legal conventions and medical technologies, artifices that extend human dominion by enabling people to be and do more than they could individually. The future of the social sciences may lie in rekindling this coalition of law and medicine and upgrading the artificial in a world that may have come to overvalue nature. ●

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Steve Fuller is Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick and the author of *Re-Imagining Sociology*.





Revolt of the mullahs

Power in Iran lies in the hands of the unelected conservative establishment

Iran's election fiasco seemingly confirmed for Iranian reformists a conclusion that tens of millions of Iranian citizens reached long ago—the country's Islamic government, as it exists today, is beyond rehabilitation. Whether ordinary Iranians now believe that the reformers are also beyond redemption is an open question.

Since the landslide 1997 election of President Mohammed Khatami, Iranian reformers had tried (to no avail) to change the system from within. Initially hopeful,

Iranians grew impatient and then despondent after years of waiting in vain. Reformists were justly criticised for lacking

COMMENT
Karim Sadjadpour



unity and resolve, but in

truth their greatest impediment was a lack of constitutional authority. Power in Iran lies in the hands of the unelected conservative establishment, namely Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the twelve-

member Islamic Guardian Council.

The Guardian Council's barring of over 2,000 mostly reformist candidates from participating in the parliamentary elections was the last straw. Reformist parties boycotted the vote. Despite a frenzied public relations campaign by regime officials, only half of all eligible voters participated. In Tehran less than a third of the electorate turned out.

Foreign journalists declared it the biggest legitimacy crisis in the 25-year history of the Islamic Republic, but Iranians seemed surprised by the commotion. They held no illusions that their country was a democracy.

Iran's near-term political future remains unclear. How reformists regroup, and how the youthful Iranian populace reacts, depends largely on the path the conservatives take. Similar to reformists, Iranian conservatives are a mixed bag. Many are reactionary religious fundamentalists who abhor the concept of democracy.

However, a small but increasing number of conservative thinkers—while not democrats—advocate a more pragmatic and conciliatory approach, essentially adopting the language that once worked so well for the now-beleaguered reformists. "It's better for all of us that mainstream conservatives go to parliament, people who are not extremist but pragmatic and moderate," says influential newspaper editor Amir Mohebian, the emerging face of Iranian "compassionate conservatism."

Whether conservative ideologues or pragmatists dominate the new parliament—which takes office in June—remains to be seen. Either way, the conservatives must weigh their strategy carefully. A more ideological and antagonistic approach of increased political and social repression could stir Iran's discontented masses, reviving the non-violent but radicalised reformists. Some of these now call for passive resistance and civil disobedience.

Ayatollah Khamenei's task is to rein in conservative ideologues and make sure pragmatic conservatism prevails. That

Khamenei is himself more of an ideologue makes that task doubly difficult for him. Although he is capable of providing increased political and social freedoms, he is simply unwilling.

Above all, the conservatives' fate—and the fate of the regime as a whole—depends on the country's punishing economy. Despite Iran's vast oil wealth, close to a third of the population lives in poverty. Inflation and unemployment remain rampant. Two-thirds of Iran's 69 million people are under 30 years old, and officials admit they have no way of accommodating the burgeoning labor force. For the majority of Iranians, economic improvement is the priority. Conservatives, no less than reformers, must come to terms with this reality. No matter how hard they try, there exists no simple or immediate solution to Iran's endemic economic corruption and mismanagement. But while Iran's near-term political prospects appear ominous, there are reasons to be hopeful about the longterm political future. An indigenous civil society has emerged; indeed, Iran appears to be the only nation in the Islamic Middle East that is building a sustainable liberal foundation from the bottom up. Monarchic and theocratic systems have both failed. Backers of a socialist model have gone the way of the Soviet Union. Liberal democracy is essentially the last man standing in Iran.

The road from authoritarianism to democracy will not be smooth or short. Agitators for reform will continue to push. Regime loyalists will continue to push back. In the absence of a credible and readily available political alternative, deadlock will likely continue, with the pace of change slower than the population demands. Courageous Iranians who have laboured to reform their country may continue to feel as though they are plowing the seas. ●

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Karim Sadjadpour is an analyst with the International Crisis Group and currently a visiting fellow at the American University of Beirut.

The new cultural revolution in China is rooting out the old in favour of the new

ANTOANETA BEZLOVA in BEIJING

Beijing's ambition to re-invent itself as an ultra-modern capital has sparked a frenzy of copycat metropolises, infuriating preservationists and state planners and re-igniting an old debate about the emergence of megacities in China. The Chinese capital has just announced an impressive plan to transform itself into a "modern cosmopolitan city with unique characteristics"—bureaucratic jargon that eyes to place Beijing with grand global cities like New York, Tokyo and London. In preparation for the 2008 Olympics, Beijing is already being subjected to one of the most extensive urban re-engineering projects ever undertaken by an existing city, costing over \$100 billion.

A monumental city of great avenues, massive ring roads, grandiose ministries and banks, giant stadiums and shopping emporiums is rising at breathtaking speed. Meantime, the remains of old Beijing are being dwarfed and

gradually demolished. Even some of the city's top architects concede that the scorecard is mixed. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which had declared the inner city of the capital a world heritage site, has raised its voice to protest the callous disregard of preservation by greedy developers working in tacit agreement with local authorities.

From the original 6,000 'hutong', Beijing's narrow alleys that criss-cross the inner city, a mere 25 are being preserved. Out of a thousand temples, a few dozen will be left, isolated islands set in a grid of eight-lane expressways. Preservationists have long charged that by destroying all traces of old China, Beijing would find it hard to measure ranks with cities like Paris and London, which have incorporated the past into their present.

Yet Beijing's example has been so tantalising many other Chinese cities have declared they want to

Big city dreams



become big megalopolises too. The candidates include many beyond Shanghai and Guangzhou—Beijing's obvious rivals in the booming east and south coasts of the country.

In the early 1990s, the government created buffer cities—settlements with populations of less than 500,000—to prevent the big cities from swelling to unmanageable proportions. More than 200 buffer cities were established between 1990 and

1997. Then, alarmed by satellite photos that showed that China was losing more than 500,000 hectares of arable land a year to housing, roads and factories, the government stopped encouraging the expansion of towns.

In recent years, the urbanisation trend has picked up, fuelled by projections that increasing the population of China's largest cities would boost consumer spending while efficiently preserving land and other

resources. "We anticipate that by 2020 some 300 million to 400 million rural dwellers would have moved to China's towns and cities," says Chen Xiwen, one of China's top rural-sector officials. Government officials have also been under increasing pressure to meet world urbanisation rates. Despite being home to 20 percent of humanity, China has only two megacities with populations of more than 10 million: Shanghai and Beijing. ● (IPS)



While Nepal prepares to enact a reservation policy, let's examine its track record in other countries

Should we affirm affirmative action?

Equal rights for all citizens are fundamental to a liberal order. Such rights offer opportunities for political participation, to form associations and to speak one's mind. But they also open doors to economic participation and doors to participation in social institutions like education. Constitutional guarantees of these rights are the

COMMENT
Ralf Dahrendorf



great achievement of the long battle for citizenship that marked the last two centuries. However, such legal guarantees of rights are often insufficient. Even the right to vote means little for someone who is totally dependent on other people or institutions. Equality before the law remains an empty promise for those who cannot afford to make use of it or simply do not know how to do so. The civil right to an education according to talent requires encouragement of many kinds. Thus, one great theme of social progress in the last century was to imbue the abstract concept of equal rights with social substance. This meant active encouragement by information, by political education, for example. As far as education was concerned, it often meant committing resources to financial assistance for students, such as subsidised loans or scholarships. Yet when all this was done, certain stubborn obstacles to equal participation remained. Major groups remained underrepresented among societies' most successful citizens. This was notably the case for women and for some cultural minorities, especially if these were defined by unchosen "ascriptive" characteristics, such as skin color. Few people from these groups were found among senior managers, government ministers, professors, doctors and lawyers, so that the suspicion grew that there are largely invisible barriers blocking access to such positions.

Perhaps entrenched institutional cultures militated against women or black people. Wanting real citizenship for all meant that more had to be done than offering legal guarantees, information or even financial support. It was a courageous step, first taken in the United States, to decide that at least for a while a new kind of policy was needed to remedy long-term injustices. Affirmative action, as it was called, consisted of rules that set aside a certain percentage of representation among candidates for office, students and teachers, police and the military and in other walks of life to members of hitherto disadvantaged groups. The US Supreme Court became the guardian of affirmative action. Wherever it was seriously tried, affirmative action undoubtedly had some success. This is notably the case in countries that were once homogeneous but now have to deal with citizens who are black or Muslim or are otherwise in an identifiable and neglected minority position. But at the very moment that other countries were looking to America for a policy model, affirmative action began to raise questions, of which three are particularly important. First, is there not a risk of a kind of inverted injustice by which the traditionally privileged become the new underprivileged? The US Supreme Court confronted this question when it first dealt with the case of a white student who was not admitted to medical school despite having better academic qualifications than other applicants. In Britain, children in private schools must now fear to be at a disadvantage because of the pressure on universities to admit more students from state schools. This takes us back to the old and vexing question: can we be equal and excellent too? Second, is equal representation at all levels really what all groups want or need? After all, the "feminisation" of the teaching profession in many countries has

not done any harm. Many countries have benefited from the entrepreneurialism of their Chinese or Jewish minorities. Are we perhaps pursuing too mechanical an ideal which confuses the absence of privilege and disadvantage with the absence of diversity? Third, is affirmative action in some cases producing a new kind of rigid segmentation that destroys the very civil society it was intended to create? Are women, for example, always the best defenders of women's interests? The same question can be raised for members of religious groups and ethnic minorities, or even of certain social classes. One shudders to think of parliaments in which the main criterion of membership is to belong to a group in need of affirmative action. Indeed, in some countries, democracy fails to deliver imaginative and effective governance because the main objective seems to be to have all major groups on board. To repeat the earlier point: affirmative action was and is a courageous final step in the fight for universal citizenship rights - not just on paper, but in reality. But affirmative action must not become an enduring principle of a liberal order. If any set of rules needs a "sunset clause" to enforce review after a specific and limited period, it is affirmative action. The flexibility of the US Supreme Court in this regard is admirable. Elsewhere it is probably best to include in the laws of countries and the statutes of organizations a clause that makes affirmative action lapse after five years, or at most ten. Such a clause could be renewed, but there is nothing so effective as a firm deadline to force a thorough review and concentrate minds. ● (Project Syndicate)

Ralf Dahrendorf a former European Commissioner from Germany, is a member of the British House of Lords, a former Rector of the London School of Economics and a former Warden of St Antony's College, Oxford

Haiti on fire again

Haiti, once again, is ablaze. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide is widely blamed and he has just been toppled. Almost nobody understands that today's chaos was made in Washington: deliberately, cynically and steadfastly. History will bear this out. In the meantime, political, social and economic chaos is deepening, and Haiti's impoverished people are suffering. The Bush Administration has been pursuing policies likely to topple Aristide since 2001. The hatred began when Aristide, then a parish priest and democracy campaigner against Haiti's ruthless Duvalier dictatorship, preached liberation theology in the 1980's. Aristide's attacks led US conservatives to brand him as the next Fidel Castro. They floated stories that Aristide was mentally deranged. Conservative disdain multiplied several-fold when President Bill Clinton took up Aristide's cause after he was blocked from electoral victory in 1991 by a military coup. Clinton put Aristide into power in 1994 and conservatives mocked Clinton for wasting America's efforts on 'nation building' in Haiti. This is the same right wing that has squandered \$160 billion on a far more violent and dubious effort at 'nation building' in Iraq. Attacks on Aristide began as soon as the Bush administration assumed office. I visited President Aristide in Port-au-Prince in early 2001. He impressed me as intelligent and intent on good relations with Haiti's private sector and the US. No firebrand, he sought advice on how to reform his economy and explained his realistic and prescient concerns that the American right would try to wreck his presidency.



The chaos in Haiti is made in Washington

Haiti was clearly in a desperate condition: the most impoverished country in the western hemisphere, with a standard of living comparable to sub-Saharan Africa despite being only a few hours by air from Miami. Life expectancy was 52 years. Children were chronically hungry. An AIDS epidemic, the worst in the Caribbean, was running unchecked. The health system had collapsed. Fearing unrest, tourists and foreign investors were staying away, so there were no jobs to be had. But Aristide was enormously popular in early 2001. Everybody referred to the President affectionately as "Titid." Here, clearly, was an elected leader with the backing of Haiti's poor, who constituted the bulk of the population. When I returned to Washington, I spoke to senior officials in the IMF, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and Organization of American States. I expected to hear that these international organisations would be rushing to help Haiti. Instead, I was shocked to learn that they would all be suspending aid, under vague 'instructions' from the US. America, it seemed, was unwilling to release aid to Haiti because of irregularities in the 2000 legislative elections and was insisting that Aristide make peace with the political opposition before releasing any aid. The US position was a travesty. Aristide had been elected president in an indisputable landslide. He was, without doubt, the popularly elected leader of the country: a claim that George W Bush cannot make about himself. The more one sniffed around Washington the less America's position made sense. People in positions of responsibility in international agencies simply shrugged and mumbled that they couldn't do more to help Haiti in view of the Bush veto on aid. Moreover, by saying that aid would be frozen until Aristide and the political opposition reached an agreement, the Bush administration provided Haiti's un-elected opposition with an open-ended veto. Aristide's foes merely had to refuse to bargain in order to plunge Haiti into chaos. That chaos has now come. It is sad to hear rampaging students on BBC and CNN saying that Aristide 'lied' because he didn't improve the country's social conditions. Yes, Haiti's economic collapse is fueling rioting and deaths, but the lies were not Aristide's. The lies came from Washington. ● (Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is a professor of economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University in New York



Protecting the innocent

Rajaram Gautam in *Nepal* 28 February-12 March

नेपाल

Have Nepali citizens lost their right to live? They get killed while on their way to meet relatives or while celebrating festivals. They get caught in the crossfire. Many are suspected to be state informers or Maoist militants and are killed. Children die while playing with metal objects they find by the roadside.

Civilians are fast becoming targets of both the Maoists and the security forces. According INSEC, 191 civilians were killed by the state and another 259 by the Maoists in the last eight years. Maoist victims include teachers, political activists and local government representatives. The individual assassinations by the Maoists continue. Now they have started targeting senior political leaders and army officers. The security forces have also been targeting ordinary civilians, as is evident from the recent killings in Nuwakot, Kalikot, Bara, Sindhuli, Tehrathum and Chitwan. The question is, why are the citizens getting killed by the entity that is supposed to protect them? Experts list the following reasons:

- Action taken based on false information
- Insufficient knowledge of human rights issues
- Strong animosity towards Maoists
- Revenge against those who harmed family and colleagues
- Psychological pressure and aggressive state of mind
- Fingers always on trigger while on patrol
- Not being accountable towards the civilians in absence of local government representation

But the main problem seems to be trigger happiness of a jittery army. “A soldier on patrol is fully authorised to open fire if he feels threatened,” said army spokesperson, Dipak Gurung.

Now people have started speaking out against the unjust killings. Recently in Bara locals held a street demonstration protesting the killing of Kisor Patel and Suresh Patel in Sisahiniya village, but it proved to be in vain. There was no response at all from the government. A similar protest against the Maoists would have lead to terrible repercussions as was evident from the assassination of Ganesh Chilawal, the anti-Maoist activist who was killed for burning effigies of Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai in Kathmandu last month. The army has started to realize that the human rights situation is getting out of hand, and has responded by organising human rights training with help of ICRC.

On the other hand, all the Maoists have done is to apologise for killing innocent people. The Maoist still terrorise ordinary villagers by planting bombs in the villages, blowing up public vehicles, attacking unarmed civilians and assassinating local political leaders and activists. The security forces also continue to take action against innocent civilians despite commitments from the state to be careful during security operations. In a bid to show its commitment, the army announced in January it would take action by imprisoning 15 army personnel and suspending 7 senior officers, but their names or their crimes were never revealed. The government has established a human rights cell in all the army, police and armed police force units which are coordinated by a section in the prime minister’s office. In reality, though, the situation has not improved at all.

Maoist jamindars

Rajdhani, 2 March

राजधानी

Maoist rebels in Dang have begun distributing land captured from what they call the feudal class among their supporters, activists, families of martyrs and deserters from the army. The newly elected district people’s government chief Indrajit Chaudhari said this was in line with the land policy of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). At a press conference in Bagmare in Dang on Sunday, Chaudhari said his party has also intensified the process of seizing land from zamindars in the area. “We will be flexible with the landlords who are ready to compromise with our land policy,” he added. The Maoists have allocated Rs 6 million for militia and security training, agriculture, forest management, health, education and culture in the current fiscal year. The new Maoist district government has decided to collect tax from all possible quarters. It has also confirmed that organisations linked to the ‘old regime’ and the United States will not be allowed to operate here. At a press meet, the rebels said they were on a campaign to maximise the strength of their district militia which is now at 1,000. “We have control over all areas of the district except in Tribhubanagar and Tulsipur municipalities,” Chaudhary said.

Social stigma

Gorkhapatra, 1 March

गोरखापत्र

Banepa—Sri Maya (name changed) is perhaps one of the worst victims of social cruelty. After she was falsely accused of being HIV positive, she ended up in the streets and has been living there for the last 15 years. She is often seen wearing rags and

sleeping on the pavement. Whenever people see her they stone and beat her and call her “AIDS patient”. In fact she does not even have the disease. In an effort to find out the truth about Sri Maya, a local NGO took her for HIV testing and the result came out negative. But despite this, society still mistreats her and Sri Maya is under immense psychological trauma. Sri Maya hates the sight of men. There are reports her police officer husband abandoned her and after that even her parents refused to give her shelter. Recently, a group of youths beat her up and stole her few belongings. Every morning she goes to a nearby temple and collects rice and food offered by worshippers. Even the NGO that tested her didn’t think it necessary to put her in a rehabilitation centre. Sri Maya continues to live in misery in Banepa’s bus park.

Banking on reform

Space Time, 2 March

स्पेसटाइम टैमिक

Immediately after the World Bank charged the government of not being serious about financial reforms, the IMF has begun evaluation of Nepal’s commitment to the Poverty Reduction Grant Facility (PRGF). Based on the report, the fund will decide whether or not to continue the program. An IMF team led by Asia Director Mulayan Indrawati is in town and has already begun the evaluation process. Three years after it began lobbying, Nepal was finally allowed to enter the PRGF program on agreeing to the fund’s conditions that Nepal would have to attend two different targets of monetary index and institutional reform within six months. The monetary index is largely symbolic, and therefore does not matter so much. But institutional reform is mandatory. “There has

been no progress in institutional reform,” said a Nepal Rastra Bank official. Since the World Bank has found out that the primary conditions of institutional reform have not been met, it has withheld its second phase of the reform programs. IMF’s institutional reform conditions include the government’s cooperation to contract management at Nepal Bank Limited and the Rastriya Banijya Bank, prohibiting the banks’ black-listed debtors from getting loans.

Driving range

Annapurna Post, 29 February

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

For transport workers in Dang, work has become a hot potato. Against their will, they are forced to carry soldiers over dangerous roads. A roadside landmine planted by Maoists on 22 February hit a civilian bus carrying security forces from Ghorahi to Lamahi of Dang district. Two soldiers and bus driver Yam Prasad Gupta were killed on the spot. Nineteen other soldiers and the conductor were injured. After the driver’s death, his wife and two daughters have been left without their family breadwinner. “After receiving repeated calls, he had left with a sad face that night without speaking to anyone,” his wife Goma said with tears in her eyes. “How can the drivers run the risk of their lives while carrying security forces? If they are made to do so, they must receive the facilities like the security personnel do.” Gupta’s also spends her time grieving. “The security personnel who died in the same vehicle get assistance. So, why should my son, who was driving the vehicle, be deprived of such compensation?” she asks.



Bus: United Coach
Girija: Come on, get inside!
Deuba: Will you drop me at Singha Darbar?

राजधानी Rajdhani, 29 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Should I again return to become Girija’s kamaiya?”

— Sher Bahadur Deuba in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, March 2

According to a committee of Rapti Zone Transporters' Association, after the incident, the Chief District Officer, a senior official of the army and a deputy superintendent of police had attended a meeting and decided to compensate Gupta at par with security personnel. Transport labourers have warned that they will launch a strike if the agreement is not implemented within 15 days. This was not the first time a civilian driver has been killed while driving for security forces in Dang. In a similar incident, Chhedilal Chaudhary was killed almost one-and-a-half years ago. His wife Bina has not received any compensation as of yet. The Rapti Zone transport entrepreneurs say they have been compelled to deploy six vehicles in Dang everyday to carry security troops. "It is injustice to use the non-combatants like us for warfare," transport labourers complain. "We can no longer carry the security forces. Our voices must be heard."

Deserting Mao

Nepal Samacharpatra, 2 March

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Dharan—The Royal Nepali Army (RNA) has obtained a report from a Maoist commander which says that moral degradation and deserting the outfit is on a sharp rise. RNA says the report, filed five months ago by cadre for the

Maoist eastern command, has made it easier to learn about the present state of the rebel force lists problems faced by the units. The report is filed by Commissar Basant of the Sangram battalion. The battalion has a total of 358 guerrillas split into three companies. The report says the 10-month-old battalion was having a tough time continuing its activities. "The battalion has not been able to deploy an adequate number of forces as per the decision of the divisional headquarters," the report reads, adding that 24 guerrillas were sent from Sankhuwasabha and 60 from Morang to join the battalion. In his report, Basant says military action has not been as effective as expected because most weapons are not in proper condition and there are no skilled technicians available to repair them. The report also discloses that a Maoist sentry raped a 14-year-old girl and gunned down a farmer. It appears that the group has financial problems as well. "The decision to provide Rs 100 to each guerrilla member a month has not been implemented due to a lack of funds," the report states, adding that 25 guerrillas had been killed in the past 10 months. Maoists also said they had killed 14 people including ex-army officials and policemen. The RNA claims the report indicates a growing trend of defection within the rebel outfit.

(Nepalnews.com)

Bhutanis suffer

Space Time, 2 March

स्पेसटाइम टैनेक

Damak—The Bhutani government has denied school enrolment to thousands of Nepali-speaking Bhutani children. Only a few months back, many children in south Bhutan were not allowed to enroll in new classes without a No Objection Certificate (NOC) which is available only through the Police Headquarters in Thimphu. Bhutani citizens are deprived of all privileges and rights without a NOC. Thousands of children in southern Bhutan's Samchi, Sarbhang, Dagna, Samdup, Jokher, Chirang and Chhuka districts were asked to quit school when they failed to show their NOC papers.

"Now these children are forced to work as shepherds after the government action," said Bhutani leader SB Subba, who recently returned from a visit to Indo-Bhutani border.

Getting an NOC is a long process. First they need approval from the local village council, then process through the *Dungpa* (sub-divisional officer) and *Dzongda* (district head officer) and eventually get the certificate from the police chief. Despite having an overall population of 300,000, only 6,000 children in south Bhutan are enrolled in school. By contrast, in Nepal 41,000 children from the total 100,000 Bhutani refugees have been admitted into schools. "The Bhutani government is trying to deprive southern Bhutanis of every privilege by making NOC mandatory," says Subba. Since the Bhutani army built their barracks in the village schools, students have not been able to go to class for the last 12 years. The government has established army and police camps in all the 21 government schools of six districts. These schools built with help of local people are now being used to torture the villagers.

Getting a citizenship certificate is much more difficult. The King's brother-in-law, Tshering Wangda, is in charge of citizenship unit at the Home Ministry and he has given strict orders not to give citizenship to any Nepali-speaking Bhutanis. "The government has been doing everything to displace us from Bhutan," said Subba who adds that denying citizenship has been one way to get rid of the Nepali speaking Bhutani population.



Digging for Tharu roots

A new book pores through royal records to find how past kings dealt with Nepal's indigenous Tharu

Under oppressive circumstances, it's too frightening to contemplate the gloom that lies ahead. Dreams turn into nightmares. Fear replaces hope. Saving sanity becomes the top priority. In such situations, it's not unusual to fall back upon the glories of an imagined past.

The only source of glory of all subject communities in a kingdom is their association with the ruling dynasty. Hence it's not unusual that Tej Narayan Panjiar began to collect Royal Documents to reclaim the honour that was accorded by the rulers of the land to his ancestors.

In Maithil society, Panjiar is traditionally a person who keeps the genealogical records of a particular cast. In this volume, the collector's canvass is much bigger ranging from Vijayapur in the eastern tarai to Binayekpur in the Gorakhpur district of Indian territory. However, the omission of four districts of Naya Muluk (Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur) raises an important question—isn't the present plight of Tharus in this region and their absence of any visible connection with the royal dynasty somehow interrelated?

Land administration in the tarai for the benefit of the rulers is the basic theme of all the lal mohars in the collection. The current Chairman of the Raj Parishad Parshu Narayan Chaudhary is perhaps the first Tharu court noble. The Panjiar Collection gives a glimpse of Tharu history spanning nearly three centuries. No Tharu in that entire period seems to have acquired an office of prominence under any king.

Unsurprisingly, most anthropologists studying Nepal have concentrated their interests on ethnic groups of the hills, valleys and

mountains. Academic enquiries aren't as unbiased as they claim to be. It has been in the interest of the ruling class—and their imperial sponsors



abroad—to create a body of knowledge about Rais, Gurungs, Magars and Limbus because these valiant tribal groups have traditionally produced cannon fodder. Bahun, Chhetri and Newars had to be studied because they are the ones who have always ruled, and continue to rule, this country. Tarai communities were never considered important enough to deserve special attention, but this book could be a harbinger of change.

In addition to the names credited on the cover, acknowledgements in the book mentions Mahesh Chandra Regmi, Harka Gurung, Rishikesh Shaha, Prem Khatry, Tirtha Prasad Mishra, Kanak Mani Dixit and Suresh Lama. It's difficult to imagine a more exclusive team of Nepalis to appropriate the history of Tharus for the court in Kathmandu.

Educated Tharus bemoan the double jeopardy of their community: they are too close to madhesis to be anything else, but too beholden to the court in Kathmandu (due to tenancy relationships) to develop local solidarity. The crisis in Naya Muluk is even more acute where, at present, the security forces consider every Tharu youth to be a Maobadi unless proven otherwise, and the insurgents are so suspicious about cadre there that most militia commanders are from the hills.

This collection succeeds in laying the foundation of future studies by chronicling the glories of the past. The challenge now is to overcome fears and begin dreaming about an inclusive Nepali society where Tharu will cease to be a term of abuse and acquire its rightful place in the polity of the country. ● (Review by CK Lal)

The Kings of Nepal & the Tharu of the Tarai
Edited by Gisele Krasukopff and Pamela Deuel Meyer
rusca press and CNAS



DC-3s drop supplies over Mandalay during the Burma campaign

Tul Bahadur Pun joined the British Army during the Second World War and was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery on the Burma front. In this first part of his memoirs, he talks about recruitment and his first action with the Kargil Pathans in Kashmir. He describes flying into battle against the Japanese in Burma in a glider. This serialisation of the testimonies of retired Gurkha soldiers is translated from *Lahurey ka Katha* by Dev Bahadur Thapa.

Gurkhas on gliders

I was recruited on the 18 April 1940 in Gorakhpur, or Kunraghat as it was also called. My age was recorded as 18 years although my real age was 23-24 years.

I had attempted to join the army earlier but was not successful and had stayed home working in the goth. Soon, war broke out and recruiters started coming. This time they weren't as strict. Medical and other examinations were waived. The recruiting authorities did not even ask for our age, they were instructed to simply write 18 years. Those days, if we started at dawn and walked till nightfall, we would reach Nautanwa in five days. There we boarded a train and reached Gorakhpur. This time we were even given an advance. Our small village was called Batuk. Even that small village was visited by four recruiters, and each could take along 60 persons. The village did not even have 20-25 people for recruitment, so there was competition among the recruiters. I received half a rupee as advance.

After the recruitment process at Kunraghat, we were given training at a big cantonment in Abbottabad, now in Pakistan. We were pushed into war after completing a six month training. Rebel Pathans had caused havoc at a place called Dumbdel, which lies close to Kargil. We experienced our first encounter there. We became more alert after that. On the conclusion of that battle the Brigadier ordered special training for us as we seemed cleverer than the others. We proceeded from there to a place

beyond Rawalpindi where there was a thick forest and also a large river. There we were trained to cross rivers, row boats and climb trees with the help of a rope line. They taught swimming to those who did not know how. That river, called Barchha, was quite large as it flows into the sea.

We were trained in the art of making temporary dwellings inside the jungle, what to eat, how to ascend the hill and how to descend. Another training on how to operate a glider followed. A glider looks like helicopter but has no engine and is hollow inside. It is carried hung on an aeroplane with a chain, taken to the appropriate place and then the chain is cut. We were trained to land at a suitable place. After the landing, the wings were disconnected and hidden inside the jungle. Also we were trained how to bring down the plane (glider) in case it got entangled in a tree.

Before going to the front, the commanders had to undergo examination. One of our commanders failed the examination. He was asked to undergo training for another two months. Meanwhile, we were sent home on leave. On our return we found that he had completed the two-month training. Then we were moved to a specially built area in Tinsukia, Assam, India. We all boarded the engineless plane, which was lifted in the air by pulling. That was protected by fighter plane which flew close by. In between were big DC-3 planes

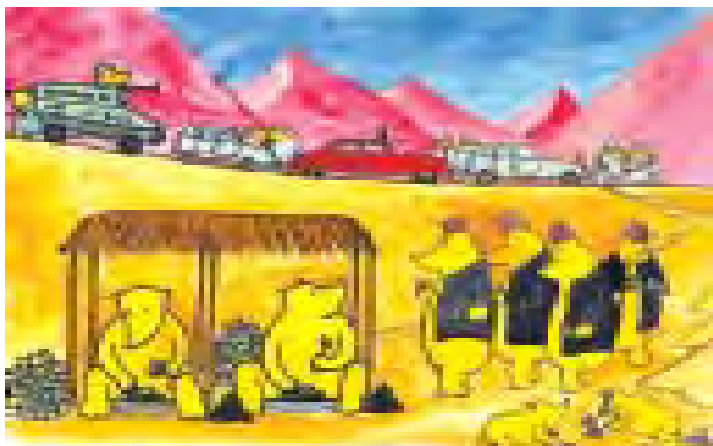
on which hung the gliders. The gliders also had wings which required a little pulling in the beginning. As we approached the landing place, the rope pulling the glider was disconnected. From above it was difficult to ascertain the ground condition as such landing is done without prior inspection of the ground below.

They left us in the middle of the jungle. That was a spacious landing ground built during the First World War which had become useless after the war. Big logs hauled by elephants had been left there, making the ground unsuitable for landing. Visibility of those logs was limited by enormous wild grass that grew there.

Quite a few of those who landed there got hurt. Out of 1,800 that landed, about 500 hit logs and were seriously injured. The tall grass was cut and the ground cleared. We carried all our materials to that spot. Mules were used to carry goods. Before moving the mules to the front, they underwent operations of the throat at Tinsukia so they wouldn't bray and give away our position to the enemy.

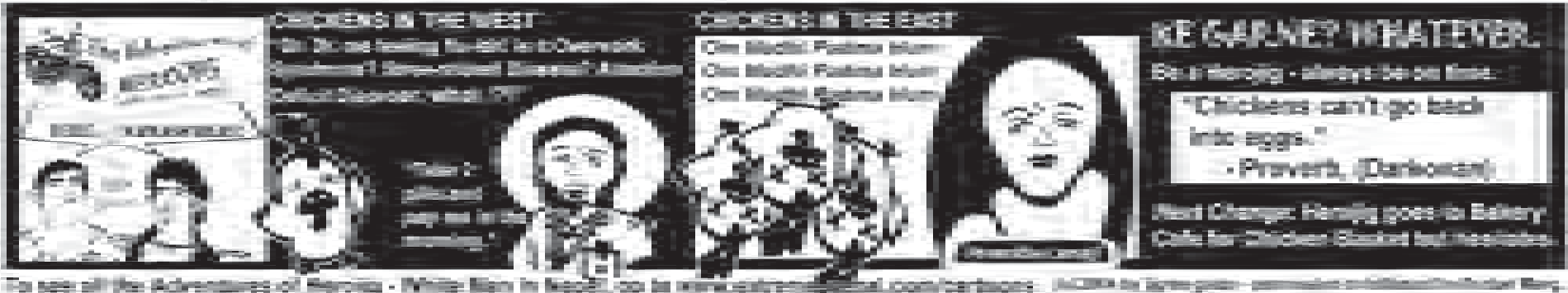
After their operation, the mules were loaded inside the plane. It was difficult enough to carry one's haversack, arms and ammunitions so there was no question of carrying other goods. This is why mules were used. Bigger weapons like machine guns could not be carried by human beings, so the mules proved to be of great help. ●

BIGBEN



The newly appointed Minister for Quality of Life on the first day of his social awareness program: "Meet the people"

"Lata ke beshima garmila bandeni." (In a land of floods, a man with a goose is a hero.)



ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Phau** 6 March
- ❖ **Technicolor Holi party** 6 March from 3PM onwards at the "Jack Lives Here" bar at 1905, Kantipath. Entry Rs 250 with welcome drink. 4225272.
- ❖ **Holi Hungama** 6 March from 11AM onwards at Yak Palace, Hotel Narayani Complex. Entry Rs 500.
- ❖ **Reflection and Reality** Paintings by Erina Tamrakar till 7 March at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Dolpo Lives** Paintings by Tenzin Norbu 6-20 March at Shangri-la Hotel
- ❖ **Toyota Women's Motor Rally** to mark International Women's Day, 7 March



EVENTS

- ❖ **Nepal Ride** Daman, Sauraha and Pokhara with Himalayan Enfielders and VW rally from 4-6 March. 4440462
- ❖ **The Power of Love** with your favourite artists and the Hits FM presenters at the Bakery Café, New Baneshwar from 6PM onwards on 11 March.
- ❖ **Aarohan Theatre Group** presents Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls House* at Sama natak ghar. Weekends till 14 March. 4466956
- ❖ **Tennis shots** Dual tennis courts at The Godavari Village Resort. Facility includes racquet & ball. 5560675
- ❖ **Dhokaima Saturday Haat** from 10AM-1PM at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. Organic vegetables, ceramics and more. 5522113

MUSIC

- ❖ **Trikaal** fusion music at the Patan Museum Café, 5:30 PM on 5 March.
- ❖ **The Trio Givone** Gypsy Jazz band from France, every night from 7PM onwards at the Piano Lounge & Bar, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** with Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band every Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, 4412999
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's every Friday 4479488

FOOD

- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** BBQ lunch with live music at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, every Saturday and Sunday 4273999
- ❖ **Café U** in Sanepa, Patan, opposite British School is now serving dinner every Friday and Saturday night. 5523263
- ❖ **Bring your wine** along every Thursday and Sunday Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **Roadhouse Café** for speciality coffees. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Escape to Godavari** on a special halfboard package for Nepalis and expatriates at the Godavari Village Resort, Taukhel. 5560675
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** Award winning Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500 TMPL Reservations or reservations@tigermountain.com
- ❖ **Thank Goodness It's Friday** Dwarika's overnight package for local residents. 4479488
- ❖ **Golf** in the Valley's last pristine forest. Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa 4451212
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** at the edge of Shivapuri. Email: info@escape2nepal.com

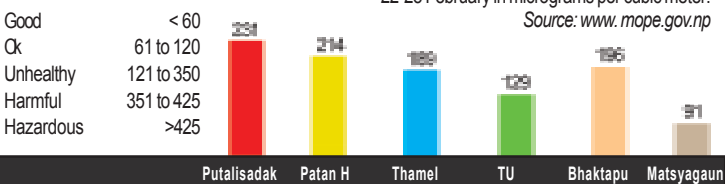
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



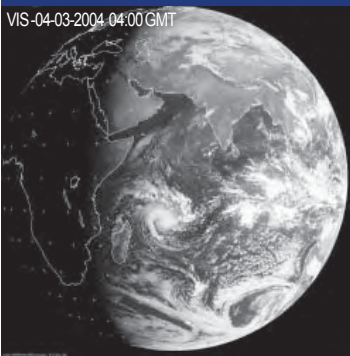
If you need any more evidence to say that the five-day (or was it three-day?) banda last week was a flop, take a look at the air quality data. The PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) level in busy streets like Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital on 25 February, the first day of the banda, went down by only 18 percent compared to the previous day. The next day, with more vehicles on the road, the pollution level edged up again by 12 percent. In Thamel, the banda brought down the PM10 level by only 6 percent and in places with less vehicular movement like Bhaktapur and Kirtipur, the PM10 level actually went up.

22-28 February in micrograms per cubic meter.

Source: www.mpe.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER



by MAUSAM BEED

An unexpected change in wind patterns caused by a high pressure block over central Tibet brought a northwesterly breeze into Kathmandu Valley, clearing the skies of haze this week. As a result the full intensity of the sun raised the maximum temperature into the mid-20s. This is expected to rise further in the coming weeks. February saw only traces of rain in the Valley, even though average precipitation is supposed to be 18mm. Expect local convection to throw up localized showers, but there are no signs of any frontal system to break the drought.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM

Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes
Edited by Sanjay Srivastava
SAGE Publications, 2004
Rs 1112

The book is a compilation of essays with special focus on the debate on sexuality in South Asia, focusing on marginalised sexual identities and providing analyses of both colonial discourses and postcolonised modernity. The book is aimed at scholars and students with special interest in gay and lesbian studies as well as gender, cultural and South Asian studies.



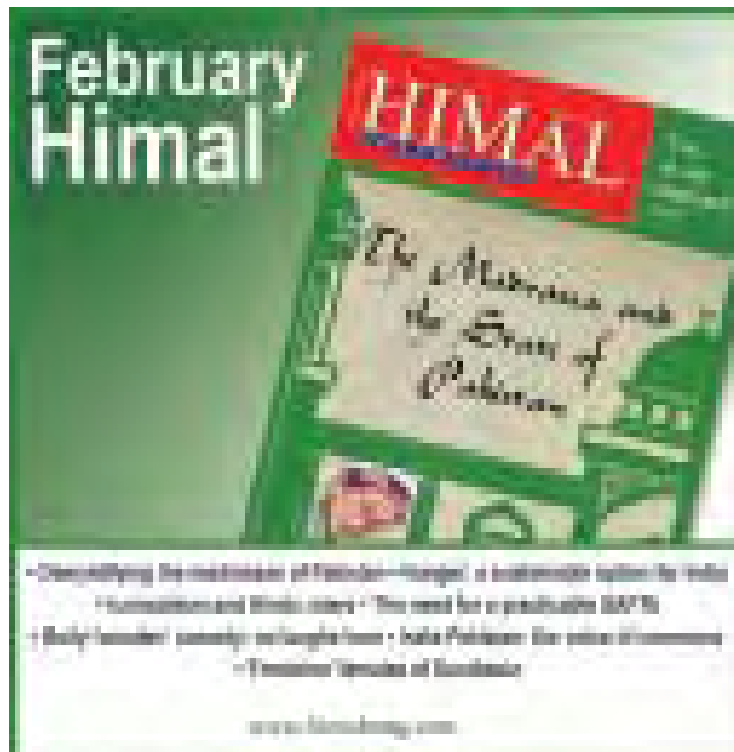
Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

A new Robert Rodriguez-directed adventure of the mythic guitar-slinging hero, El Mariachi (Antonio Banderas) set against a backdrop of revolution and greed. El Mariachi is forced out of his life as a recluse by corrupt CIA agent Sands (Johnny Depp) to sabotage an assassination plot by evil cartel kingpin Barillo (Willem Dafoe). Complete with plenty of intrigue, painful history, destruction and guitar strumming, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* promises to give you all the action you can handle.

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Inexpensive golf

Why do people say golf is an expensive sport?

Those who play the game know some of the reasons why golf is not considered a cheap sport. Even in a country like the United States, which has around 20,000 golf courses, there is still the perception that the game is not easily affordable. So what makes golf expensive, and what can be done to make it more affordable?

As with many other sports, equipment can be cheap and reasonable, or top of the line using advanced designs and technology. Because the equipment used does make a difference in golf, people

go for the latest, newest and therefore higher costing models, creating the impression that golf is an expensive sport. However, one does not need to start by spending so much. The first steps are getting the basics of the golf swing in place, and for this, many cheaper beginners clubs and balls work just fine.

Building a world class golf course is not easy or cheap. To start with, there is the requirement of about 100 acres (roughly 1,000 ropanis) of land. Finding suitable land of that size in a good area, and then investing in it is a tremendous challenge. Architect fees follow, which for a qualified and competent architect can range from a \$100,000 to over \$1 million. Finally there are the costs of building the course, which includes earth movement, irrigation, drainage, landscaping, and building the club house, car parks, roads, practice ranges and so on. Quite a daunting investment even for the private sector.

Once the course is built, must be maintained. Imagine the machinery, fuel and labour needed for cutting, maintaining and watering 100 acres of grass and natural areas. If done well, the effects can be summed up as: 'beautiful but expensive'.

Outside Nepal, governments have realized the potential of the sport, and have allocated public land and funds to build golf courses for tourism, sports promotion and recreation, environmental conservation and to give cities open green spaces. It is estimated that by the year 2005 there will be 30,000 golf courses and 85 million golfers world wide.

Has the rest of the world gone crazy, or is Nepal sleeping through another missed opportunity? Policy makers need to understand what this sport brings to a country, and to allocate land for both social and public municipal courses, which, if well run, can sustain themselves and provide the sport at an affordable level. This is the only way for more people to be encouraged to take up the sport.

The new tourism policy imaginatively proclaims promoting Nepal as a 'Sahasik' tourism destination. Well Mr (and Ms) policy makers: here's a chance for defining the nature and extent of what is meant by that policy, instead of just using adventurous words. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Head Golf Professional at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

Tuning in to God

Five-and-a-half years ago, I was standing a few steps away from Pelé in the bowels of the Stade de France, an hour or so before the World Cup final between France and Brazil.

The man that they call O'Rey, the King, flanked by two corporate PR people, was doing what he usually does at big international events. Surrounded by a gaggle of sweaty journalists, he went into retired legend mode, rattling on in a tranquil voice about the "beautiful game", the "joy it brings to millions" and the fact that "one can never compare players from different eras".

Suddenly, there was a commotion at the other end of the hall. The 20-strong multinational herd of reporters turned their backs on Pelé in mid-sentence and thundered down the hall, sending a Fifa minion and his stack of lovingly stapled match notes tumbling to the ground.

As the dust slowly cleared, I was left alone with Pelé, his minder and the two PR people. "What is happening?" a puzzled Pelé asked, his dark eyes narrowing. "Maradona is here," one of the PR people said, with a shake of the head. That day I learnt a lesson about the media, footballers and their careers once they hang up their boots. The more media-friendly you are, the more anodyne your comments, the more you pop up all over the place, the less people care.

No footballer generates the kind of visceral, passionate response that Diego Maradona does. And because Maradona does not divide his time between glad-handing sponsors, attending awards ceremonies and peddling Viagra, when he does surface and speak out, people tend to take note.

This season, La7, a small commercial television channel in Italy, signed him up to be a regular pundit on Biscardivenerdi, its Friday football discussion program. Interest was massive: the show's producers managed to sell the rights across Latin America, despite most of the

GABRIELE MARCOTTI discussion focusing on Italian football.

The program's freakshow appeal soon became evident. Maradona was supposed to appear every week, alternating between the studio and a satellite link-up from Havana, where he now lives. In fact, he has only made it to the studio once since September and often (as happened

A look at the impact of Maradona's involvement in a TV talk show



last Friday) simply doesn't bother to show up. No matter. People tune in anyway in the hope that he will materialise, much like the pilgrims who go to Lourdes expecting to see the Virgin Mary.

When he does make it, things quickly get surreal. Maradona's bloated figure, usually encased in a T-shirt (on an early appearance he wore a sleeveless vest, known in slang terms as a "wifebeater", that showed off his Ché Guevara tattoo nicely), hovers on a monitor in the background as the studio guests argue among themselves. They all

magically fall silent when the host asks him a question, usually a generic cream puff on a well-worn footballing talking point.

David Beckham? "He's a good player, but he's not a superstar. Still, I like him, though it's a pity he's English. But I can't take him too seriously. He looks like a woman. But, of course, that doesn't mean I'm attracted to him!" Cue hysterical guffawing from the studio audience. Drugs in sport? "Most chairmen take drugs themselves, they all ought to be tested!" Cue earnest nods of approval.

That is the sphere that the man has come to inhabit. While he may be reviled as a cheat in England, he remains a cult figure to much of the rest of the world, particularly in the developing countries. Theories abound. Some contend that Maradona's popularity peaked after the England game in the quarter-finals of the 1986 World Cup, not for his second goal, which many have described as the greatest ever, but for the first and the 'Hand of God'.

Maradona, representing the poor and deprived masses, brings down the Western Establishment, not with his God-given physical gifts, but with his brainpower, the very attribute that the First World maintains that the underdeveloped savages elsewhere lack. According to this line of thinking, this would also explain why some Marxist FARC guerillas in Colombia wear Osama bin Laden T-shirts: anybody who fights the dominant West is a hero.

Perhaps the explanation is simpler. Maradona is the slutty Jezebel to Pelé's girl next door, absinthe to wine coolers.

Virtually all of his former teammates—with the notable exception of Daniel Passarella, the man he replaced as Argentina captain—adore him. But more than one has told me that Maradona is sliding towards mental illness, even as he revels in his image as a footballing Ché Guevara. No matter: as long as he has a soapbox, people will flock to listen. ●

Nepali cricketers wow media

After last year's stellar performance, fans were hoping that Nepal's under-19s would make it to the Super League in this year's World Cup 2004. Despite losing to England, Nepal kept its hope alive with impressive wins against South Africa and Uganda. However, an unexpected loss to Scotland in the plate championship shattered the spirits of Nepali cricket fans.

But Nepal's young cricketers wowed the media in India and Bangladesh, where the matches were held. The popular cricket portal, Cricinfo.com, has applauded Nepal's progress in international cricket in a report titled 'Nepal contemplates the dizzyest height'.

"When their captain Shakti Gauchan smacked a four to topple South Africa it marked on of the biggest upsets in the competition history." It has also talked very highly about the selection procedure of Nepal terming it "totally decentralized". They probably mean that as a compliment.

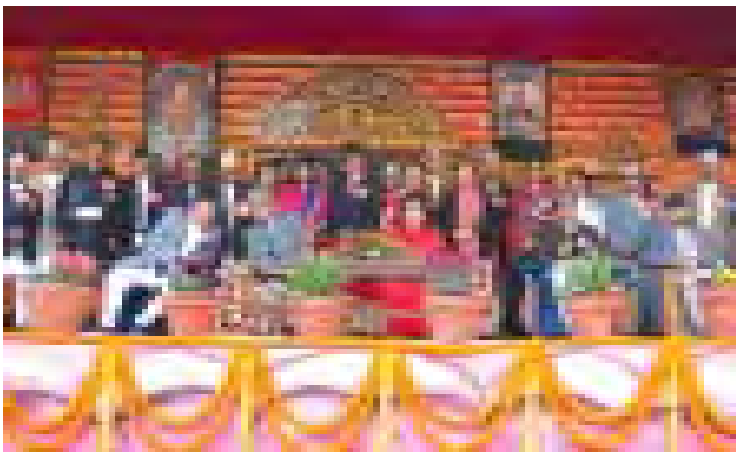
The Indian Express gushed: "After a promising start

to the tournament, when they beat a strong South African outfit, Nepal's form fizzled out. But that doesn't take away from the fact that they did beat the Safs. That puts Nepal on a higher level, than the rest of the associate members and its all happening because of the tremendous passion for the game."

In an article titled 'A helping hand from Big Brothers' the newspaper has also praised the role of Nepal's Sri Lankan coach Roy Dias. "The man making all the changes is Roy Dias, more famous as the stylish Sri Lankan batsman of 80's. Appointed three years ago, Dias has taken charge of all teams, senior and junior, and is seen as a boon for the mountain nation."

Cricinfo.com writes that to bridge the divide all that's needed is a helping hand from the Big Quadrangle: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The performance of captain Shakti Gauchan and Manjeet Shrestha received favourable mentions in all media reviews. ● (Mukul Humagain)

HAPPENINGS



MIN BAJRACHARYA

THEIR MAJESTIES: King Gyanendra and Queen Komal graced the Kshyama Puja function of the newly-renovated Akash Bhairab temple in Kathmandu on Saturday.



KIRAN PANDAY

VICTORY RALLY: Students from Padma Kanya Campus on Sunday carried out a victory parade after winning student elections.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

FINAL REST: Friends and students of educationist Fr Eugene L Watrin paid their last respects at the Church of the Assumption in Dhobighat on Monday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

ALL FOR ATTRIBUTION: Army spokesman Col Deepak Gurung briefs journalists on Wednesday at the Army HQ on the Maoist attack in Bhojpur in which 29 security personnel lost their lives.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

GHOST TOWN: Even rumours of a banda are as good as a banda. A deserted alley in Asan on Thursday with shuttered shops.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Life cycle

Life has never been easy for madhesi Nepalis in Kathmandu, whether they are vegetable vendors, barbers, masons or a bicycle repairman like Srikrishna Mandal. What set them apart is their willingness to work long hours in menial, low-paying jobs just to take care of their families. But all they get in return is abuse from arrogant urbanites who treat them as if they are not Nepalis. In addition, they face constant harassment from corrupt policemen and neighbours.

Srikrishna left his home village near Janakpur eight years ago because he couldn't feed his family from his small plot of land. They came to Kathmandu: father, mother, a small daughter and son, to start a new life. Srikrishna had hoped he could get a good job so he could educate his two children. But it wasn't easy to find one, so one day he picked a shady patch of sidewalk and started mending bicycles. All day, rain or shine, winter or summer, he repaired flat tyres. All he had was a toolbox and two square metres of pavement. Often, he would be harassed by the municipality's staff or police. A local mechanic shop tried to bribe him to relocate his business somewhere else. But Srikrishna fought back and stood his ground defending the patch of asphalt on which his livelihood depended. All his daily earnings went to support his family and there were no savings. He tried to cut the costs of living in Kathmandu by sharing a house in Koteswor with 15 other tarai people.

It took four years of hard work for his business to become established. The fact that he was always there on the roadside in Pulchok gave him visibility and he developed a regular loyal clientele. Today, he makes Rs 200 a day and can send his 15-year-old daughter, Laxmi, and 9-year-old son, Baidya, to school. They and his wife, Ramkumari, help him on banda days, when business booms because everyone is riding bicycles. He has now expanded his sidewalk shop and also sells new tyres,

repairs mountain bikes and has an inventory of bicycle spare parts.

"It's not as difficult as it used to be the first few years," Srikrishna says, yanking out the tube off a bicycle tyre. But as soon as the children finish school he plans to go back to Janakpur and start a proper bicycle repair shop. Enough of sitting by the roadside for him. He shrugs and says: "There are people who don't like us, but we work hard. My wife and children help me, and most important of all, they are proud of me." ● (Naresh Newar)



KIRAN PANDAY



Thursday's banda was a busy time for bicycle repairman Srikrishna Mandal and his wife, Ramkumari, daughter Laxmi and son Baidya, at their sidewalk shop in Pulchok.

MIN BAJRACHARYA



Why can't a woman be more like a man?

Although men are supposed to be from Mars, space robots that have been looking under rocks on the surface of the Red Planet these past weeks have found no traces of members of the male species hiding there. Perhaps, if the staffing of the American space program was more gender balanced and there were more female scientists calling the shots, the quest for intelligent life

UNDER MY HAT

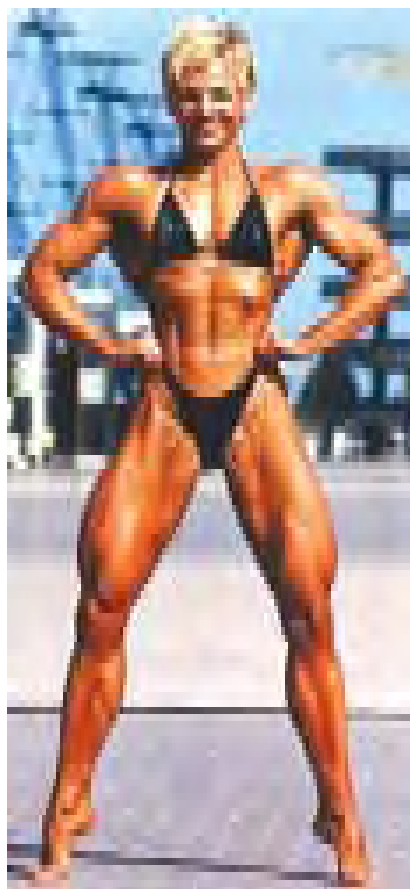
Kunda Dixit



in the inner planets would have centred instead on Venus, where there would have been a higher probability

of finding women. (The good news is that space scientists have now found proof that there is water on Mars, although no traces of it have yet been discovered in Sanepa.)

As we get ready to mark another Intergalactic Women's Day back here on Planet Earth, it is time once more to pay tribute to the longstanding struggle of women from all walks of life for equal rights with men. If men can make complete asses of themselves, it is argued, then women should also have the right to make she-asses of their good selves. This is what gender equality is all about. Over the ages, in the arena of behaving like idiots, it was the men who enjoyed a monopoly. But it is not pre-ordained which sex should have more morons, and if women too want to be as idiomatic as us men, then where is the harm?



Having had a headstart, us men have always had an unfair advantage in the race to be the most-asinine sex. So women have a lot of catching up to do, but given perseverance, commitment and determinism they can be as (if not more) idiosyncratic as us. Some men may have their egos slightly dented when they see women overtaking them in the march towards mediocrity, but they should take solace in the fact that imitation is the best form of flattery. What would be more delightful than to see women civil servants mimicking men as they squeeze zits in public while sunning themselves

on the balcony of the Department of Women and Labour.

Ever since cave men dragged cave women by the hair and chewed mastodon entrails with their mouths open, right down to the modern industrial age where men still haven't learnt to stow their toilet seats in an upright position during takeoff and landing, us boys have been rightly called the stronger sex. Speaking of which, a recent survey has found that men, on average, think about sex 23 hours a day and the remaining one hour they spend in extracurricular activities such as taking sun-baths on the balcony of the Ministry of Manpower during which period they don't think about anything in particular.

So, if women want to play catch-up with us chaps, they will have to take up some manlike hobbies, like:

- Not just complain that we have a headache, but become headaches ourselves
- Let our eyes rove all over the member of the opposite sex we are talking to, taking time to closely inspect the front bumper and the boot
- Use the Phau period to go on an all-out offensive against the opposite sex
- Treat anyone who has the nerve to overtake you on the Rabi Bhaban uphill as a personal affront to maledom and sideswipe him
- When lost in a strange city, never consult a map, never ask for directions and show we'd rather be lost than found

These simple ideas will allow even the most feminine woman to be as macho as the hairiest of us testosterone-filled numbskulls who are proud to call ourselves men.

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