



No April fool

Political parties have announced a fresh round of intensified anti-king protests starting 1 April. They say they mean business this time, and vow the agitation will continue as long as parliament is not restored and an all-party government formed. They have pooh-poohed the government's plans to announce election dates as a ploy to cling to power unconstitutionally, and said as much to visiting British special envoy Jeffrey James. The fresh demos will be concentrated in the capital. Meanwhile, they have welcomed UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's willingness to help end the conflict. See editorial: 'Kofi's offer'.

Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 129

Q. Should the political parties take part in elections if the government announces dates?

Yes (88.9%)

No (11.1%)

Don't know (0.0%)

Total votes:1,017

Weekly Internet Poll # 130. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Should the government consider renegotiating a ceasefire with the Maoists?

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THOMAS BELL

Bad blood in Beni

The stench of death is overpowering in Myagdi, and the country is sucked into a vortex of violence

THOMAS BELL in BENI

It is the morning after in Beni and a scene of utter devastation. The police station is a blackened wreck. The barbed wire had been clipped away and the perimeter wall blasted open at several points. Sandbags at the sentry posts are torn to shreds. Near the army base, a woman is washing the bloodstain from the steps outside her shop, while her daughter looks on.

The police and soldiers guarding the police base fought from 10:30 on the night of Satur-

day, 20 March, until six the next morning against thousands of Maoists, until their ammunition ran out. Those who survived either fled, or were taken prisoner. Down the road, the soldiers at the army base kept fighting till daylight and most of their casualties took place in the morning.

Next door, the CDO building has been reduced to rubble, and is still smouldering. The street outside is littered with spent ammunition and unexploded bombs. People pick their way around in silence, their faces covered, glancing at the

grotesquely disfigured Maoist corpses that lie strewn about.

The army camp is the only government building to survive partially intact, although it was nearly overrun at one point. Some 25 mortar rounds and a rocket landed here, fired from the mountains above. Whoever decided to put the district headquarters here at the confluence of the Kali Gandaki and Myagdi wasn't thinking of security.

Lt Col Ragu Nepali's office with its sandbagged windows is a wreck. He estimates there were at least

5,000 Maoists involved in the attack: frontline fighters, militia and porters. "They came in waves, like the sea, one after another, one after another," said Lt Col Nepali, looking exhausted after two nights without sleep. "There were more women than men. And many, many child soldiers, below 14. I saw them while I was shooting back." There were six Maoist bodies inside the army base and Nepali points them out: "They are all young children, this one is a girl."

continued p4-5

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KOFI'S OFFER

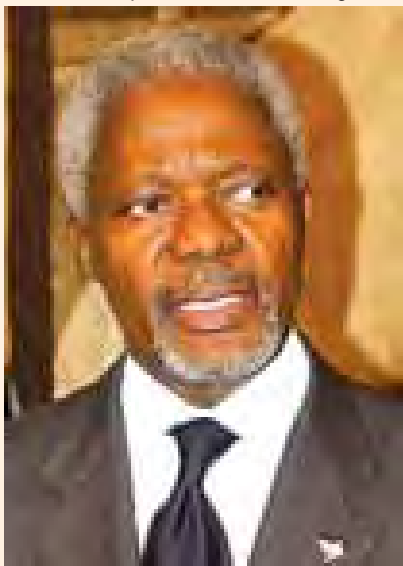
UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's serious expression of concern on Tuesday regarding the situation in Nepal ends with a reiteration of his offer to help find a solution. But he needs both the government and the Maoists to make that request for mediation.

Kofi Annan has echoed the sentiments of nearly all Nepalis: that there is no military solution to the conflict. He has urged the government and the Maoists to "end the fighting and resume the peace process with the participation of all political and civil forces in the country". We couldn't have put it better ourselves. The fact that political parties have wholeheartedly welcomed the move is also a positive sign.

Maoist leader Prachanda called on the UN to monitor human rights violations in the country. Earlier, he even expressed willingness to demobilise if there was an internationally-mediated peace process. The problem with these statements is that they are so inconsistent and PR-driven we never know if they are to be taken seriously. Besides, there is a widespread perception that previous ceasefires were used to prepare for escalation. The comrades have to admit that their lack of respect for human dignity, their brutal methods and disregard for public opinion haven't particularly endeared them to a majority of the people. They have to do much more to earn the trust of the people and potential mediators. The abduction of school pupils for use in human wave attacks makes a mockery of Maoist commitments, and even if Prachanda swears by the Geneva Convention what is the guarantee his warlords will?

Then on this side, there are military hawks who can't countenance any talk of negotiations, even while they grudgingly admit that there is no military solution. So, the slaughter gets worse, bad blood grows and the antagonism is harder to bridge. If efforts to negotiate are not initiated soon, we will see worse carnages than Bhojpur and Benis in months ahead. Both sides have to assess how much longer they can, or want to, continue this nonstop nonsense.

Kofi Annan is a busy man, and has to deal with hot spots around the world clamouring for attention. The fact that he releases an appeal like this about Nepal means a lot. The government and the Maoists should



grab this olive branch that gives them a good pretext to break the deadlock and begin genuine dialogue in search for meaningful compromise.

Outside powers, especially India, have leaned on the government to reject third party mediation, arguing that it would put a legitimate state side and an outlaw group on the same pedestal. But wouldn't internal mediation also have to do that?

Let's seize the opportunity offered by Kofi Annan and form a Multilateral Peace Commission to find a way out of this madness.

Knowing rights from wrongs

Time to evaluate past training of our security forces by British and American experts

The announcement that American military personnel are in Nepal on an "ongoing regular training exercise" in the words of an embassy press release comes as no real surprise.

Regardless of rhetoric, international military supplies and training are part of the international 'war for peace' strategy against the Maoists. Strangely, though, in a land

GUEST COLUMN
Seira Tamang

obsessed with reviews of development projects and programs, no review has been undertaken of the human rights and 'conflict' training given by donor agencies. This is important because the US military training has a poor track record on human rights. At a time when conflict specialists like Robert Gersony are making comparisons between Latin America and Nepal, with accompanying plans based on Latin American 'successes', it may be pertinent to remember that the School of Americas (SOA)—later renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation—was notorious for training military personnel soldiers and rightwing militia responsible for human rights violations in El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Chile and Argentina. Amnesty International (AI) states that in the 1980s and early 1990s the SOA used manuals that advocated "torture, extortion, kidnapping and execution".

RNA officers are sent to the

Command and General Staff School (where one of the core courses at the SOA is also taught) and the US Army War College. While tens of thousands of officers from foreign armies train in the US, AI reports that far more receive US training in their own countries through a variety of US programs. In Nepal, the real extent of US and other donor-Nepali military engagement remains beyond real public scrutiny.

What is verifiable is the fact that while some US military training includes human rights education, it is not systematically required in most other training for foreign forces. Furthermore, the 1996 Leahy Bill which requires background screening for past human rights violations of foreign recipients of US military and police training has yet to be fully implemented with no standardised process for conducting checks. Quality background vetting, in fact, varies greatly from country to country.

In response to international human rights concerns, British and US military assistance to Nepal is said to include human rights training. Training, interactions and seminars conducted by the Human Rights Cell of the RNA include: 'Human Rights and Humanitarian Law' 22-26 July 2002 and 5-9 August 2002 'Interaction program on Human Rights' on 21 August 2002, 'Interaction program by British Army human rights training team in Kathmandu, Nepalgunj and

Pokhara' 7-26 November 2002, 'Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Seminar' jointly conducted by the Judge Advocate Branches of the RNA and the US army 13-14th May 2003.

Human rights has also formed the UK's commitment to develop Nepal's Police via DfID since 1993. However, in light of reports of continued human rights violations and extra-judicial killings by the state, certain questions about the nature of military training and at the very least, the effectiveness of human rights training, needs to be raised.

There is room for legitimate questions concerning the commitment and orientation of military interventions in 'postwar', 'war for peace' and 'peace-inducing missions' in Nepal as there is elsewhere.

This must be seen in light of the Army War College's Peace-keeping Institute in Pennsylvania being closed last year with endorsement from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The rationale for the closure of the only institute dedicated to peace was belt-tightening, even though its budget was a only \$1 million a year. When asked why the Pentagon refused to provide numbers of enemy combatants killed in Iraq, Rumsfeld replied: "Death has a tendency to encourage a depressing view of war."

A review of human rights training and its effectiveness is called for in our struggle to move towards a post-conflict, democratic Nepal. ●

LETTERS

BALANCED

CK Lal in 'Poll pot' (#188) is his usual cynical self without considering the people and the country. Whereas Yubaraj Ghimire in 'Scandalous silence' in his Capital Letter column in the same issue has given us a broader perspective of the people and the nation. We readers would like to thank the *Nepali Times* for publishing the two articles in the same issue. At least it is now balanced and we don't have to read only CK Lal's well written, yet motivated, articles.

Dipak Ratna, Thamel

● CK Lal's 'Showing we have guts' (#188) has to do not only with moral courage but mostly action. Your columnist advocates the quintessential argument forwarded by Aristotle in his *Politics*, the 'Good Men' who follow and the 'Thinking Men' who lead. The fundamental underlying principle to a polity is ethics and for a functioning democracy is respect for the rule of law, which is lacking in our civil society. Aristotle also wrote how important ethics was to

individuals and their civil society. Both our intellectuals and leaders lack the most basic tool, which is educational goals and moral character to lead and have a vision for the country. Education in our country is a means to the end game of politics where all the student organizations are affiliated to one or the other political parties. The goal of education is to create thinking people and manpower for the nation so that they can lead, think and/or perform for the nation. Education is not a means to climb up the political ladder.

Moral character has its roots in religion and culture. Most of our leaders are god-fearing Hindus (in spite of some of them being communists), so the only method to get the message across to them is now in a language they will understand, ie, they will be responsible for their karma of this life. They all will go to *narka* for creating all the *dukha* for the people. If these erstwhile leaders are thinking of a legacy to leave behind, or how posterity and history will judge them, or even if they have an ounce of pride

(*marda ko choras/choris*), or if they do not want to rot in hell, they will all unite and fight the Greater Battle of Regression against the Maoists to create stability in the country and tackle poverty to alleviate the suffering of the people.

Challenging their manhood may be the only way to get them to act. If not, they will have only further justified their status of namarda.

SN Singh, email

EDUCATING FOREIGNERS

I have just read the very interesting article by Manjushree Thapa ('Educating foreigners', #188) with which I agree.

I have visited Nepal twice, the first time as a "pampered tourist" but last year I was privileged to be among ordinary families, school children, all from very poor backgrounds. But there again, most of the population are poor. I agree with the comments about foreigners and the lack of knowledge of history of Nepal. Here, the British monarchy, as you know, has no real influence over the democratic government which makes me very lucky to live here.

As you say, it is very recent in history terms that your country has had any form of democracy and I only wish that one day there will be a resolution and you will have peace and prosperity for everyone. I wish peace for all Nepalis.

Julie Sinclair, Scotland

● We enjoyed Manjushree Thapa's 'Educating foreigners'. As foreigners who visit Nepal whenever possible (though we move in rather less exalted circles than those she describes) and who load up on books at Kathmandu's excellent bookstores (what a pleasure they are) could we suggest that for her next article she compiles a list of her suggested reading?

Scott Berry, Naoko Takagi, email

LOUIS BANKS

After reading 'Louis Banks comes back' (#188) I noticed tickets priced at Rs 2,999 for an evening of jazz and an infinite supply of alcohol. I have been a jazz enthusiast for many years now, but despite my love for the music, there really is no way for me or others like me to

watch Mr Banks live. And I wonder if I would even want to. Imagine being a non-alcoholic guy who only wants good jazz, but is surrounded by people who only want to be at the 'hip joint', binge drinking all night and not quite respecting the art, for which the event is supposed to have been in the first place. The question of making Jazzmandu accessible to actual jazz lovers or those wanting a taste of it is something I wonder about too. The ticket prices really speak for something—and with audiences full of *farangs* really, is Jazzmandu about Jazz in Kathmandu, or has it sold its soul to alcohol?

S Kashish, Kathmandu

● Louis Banks is an Indian of Nepali decent, but seems to love the place he has lived in, the place he grew up in, more than some far away land where his parents came from.

Bhumika Ghimire Florida, USA

CHALLENGE

Here is a challenge to the various INGOs to submit their annual

Spring cleaning

History doesn't move in a straight line, it moves in fits and starts

For the fifth time since he was appointed last year, British special envoy to Nepal Sir Jeffery James is here again. His achievements in defusing the ongoing conflict in this country are a closely guarded secret. But our political parties did take Sir Jeffery's hints last year to temporarily suspend street protests against the constructive monarch.

The rapprochement he had promised

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



between the king and consti-

tutional players failed to materialise. King Gyanendra continues to consolidate and display his power, apparently without any second thoughts about his 4 October takeover that pushed out democratic politics through the hole of Article 127 in the constitution, the only article that still seems to be valid.

Despite the carnage on the banks of Kali Gandaki last weekend, the public felicitation in Pokhara on 29 March is going ahead. In fact, if the royal minister Kamal Thapa is to be believed, the king will be felicitated on schedule even at Ground Zero in Beni itself.

The Raj Parishad meanwhile is holding another of its roving meetings in Biratnagar next month to hear the 'people's aspirations' and submit its recommendations to the monarch. From the proceedings of this Privy Council's previous meetings at Dhangadi, Nepalganj and Pokhara, it's quite clear what these recommendations will be: call upon the king to go beyond his constitutional role.

The government-controlled media are surprisingly muted in criticism of the Maobadi, compared to the vitriol they pour against political parties. When it comes to hitting out at parties, palace-friendly propagandists have the tendency of going



DHRUBA BASNET

The ruin of the CDO building in Bhojpur which was destroyed in the 2 March attack still holds a sign that promioses a 'pro-people government'.

ballistic. They may think that running down parties helps improve the palace's image, but it discredits the already weakened political layer between the monarch and the Maoists. When the next 26 Chait comes, as it will sooner or later at this rate, who will come to the defence of the monarchy: the military and the Mandales?

The royal communication minister is half right that a section of the press has been unwittingly abetting the insurgents by ridiculing the practitioners of peaceful politics. But the way minister Thapa plans to deal with it is completely wrong. Nothing helps the anti-establishment rumour machine as effectively as curbs on the press.

When an old Nepal-hand in the UK read minister Thapa's "example from

Spain" speech calling for government restraint on media, he sent an email to a colleague two days later, "One, twenty-four hours later, the Spanish people kicked out the government. Two, they had the opportunity to do so!" If the present experiment in the governance of the country fails, it won't just be the Thapas that will go.

Sir Jeffery said he held talks on the "current political situation" with different parties. He began on the right note with a meeting at the Human Rights Cell of the Royal Nepali Army on Monday. Presumably, the Maoists are also having their views conveyed to him through respectable intermediaries. But if the British emissary were to trim the frills of the invincibility rhetoric, the helplessness of the military as well as the rebels is too stark. In the heat of the battle, the combatants may

be blinded by the slaughter, but deep inside they must know that they need the mainstream parties to bring the country back to normalcy.

If India's Central Reserve Police Force's pre-election sweep against insurgents gains momentum in the badlands of Bihar and uttar Pradesh, our own Maoists will be hard-pressed for cover. They will need the parties, not vice-versa.

For their part, the party leaders look a bit flustered lately, a bit like crabs in warming water. They will have to jump out soon, and the planned 1 April demonstration may turn out to be a harbinger of change.

Who knows, 2004 could be what the 1986 Satyagraha was to the 1990 "Peoples' Movement". History doesn't move in a straight line, it moves in fits and starts. ●

budgets and expenses for the public to review. Show us the actual percentage of their budget that is spent on ridiculous salaries as out-of-country hires, the actual percentage of their budget spent on administrative expenses and the percentage actually applied to work within their presumed and target areas. Justify these hypocrisies in clear conscience.

Corruption can also be defined as the inappropriate use of funds, or the diversion of funds from their intended purposes and targets. In those terms, the institutionalised, self-regulating systems of the dominant INGO's in Nepal is most definitely corrupt.

Of course, the common claim is that the problem is with corrupt Nepalis. But who is more corrupt, the person who originally controls the money and inappropriately, unethically uses 80 percent of the original funds, or someone who might inappropriately, and equally unethically, use 20 percent of the remaining funds?

A common response, most likely on the minds of the

aforementioned colonialists and parasites is that the excess in pay is required to bring in the 'experts' needed to fill these positions. The most important qualification for any of these positions is that the person is interested in the position for the right reasons (income, control, power and resume building are not among the right reasons here), that their heart is in it, that they truly believe in these efforts and that they have an understanding of Nepal.

Here some humble recommendations:

- 1 Reduce these absurd salaries. They are unjustified, unethical and breed dissension, disparity and, yes, corruption
- 2 Hire more Nepalis, and provide them with equal pay. This is after all their nation, their people and their problems: they understand a great deal more than 'experts'
- 3 Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of your much-publicised activities, and more importantly...
- 4 . . .connect this to an independent outside review, which you will respond to
- 5 Get out of the Kathmandu Valley and into the field.

- 6 Get involved within your Nepali community. I wonder how many of the expatriate community actually know their Nepali neighbours? Here's another open challenge: donate 10 percent of your absurd, unethical incomes or volunteer 10 percent of your time in small-scale local community development activities
- 7 Give credence to the hundreds of qualified volunteers working at the grassroots level throughout Nepal, not for a love of money or power, but out of a love for Nepal and a respect for humankind
- 8 Provide a forum for communication, advocacy, formulation, implementation and review between the untouchable volunteer community and the upper-caste policy makers of the INGO bureaucracy

It would be fairly instructive if the amount of total international aid Nepal has received were divided by the population. Compare this number to a Nepali's average yearly income.

Pete Heyn, Kathmandu

HEROJIG
Herojig makes me laugh like

anything. How does his head work anyway? I mean, what is he thinking about when he is doing nothing? I really want to know, because I think he is a big time talent. Having the capability to make others laugh is something wonderful. Keep it up, is all I can say.

A Amrita, email

- Does his motto ('lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi') explain Herojig's sudden fame?

Tsering Dolma

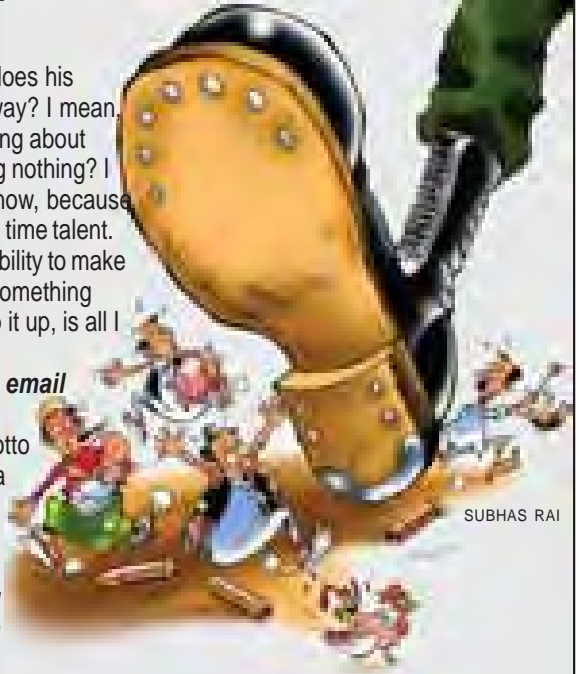
HAT
Wow guys and guyettes, kick butt issue was #188. Kunda Dixit had me rolling off my motorbike seat as I have been following the new rule of reading *Nepali Times* while driving downtown on the right side of the road ('Driving me nuts', #188).

Name withheld on request, email

GOLF
It is commendable that *Nepali*

Times has now a sports page. However, I believe it would be more relevant and reflective of the nation if the column also featured the much more popular soccer, volleyball or even cricket, instead of focusing solely on golf. Or has bourgeois golf eclipsed blue collar soccer in our poor country?

Kabita Pradhan, email



SUBHAS RAI

“They came in waves,



ALL PICS: THOMAS BELL

From l-r: Lt Col Nepali's office in the army base took a direct hit from a mortar round fired from the mountains above

Beni's welcome sign for tourists is pockmarked with bullet holes

An army Mi-17 prepares to airlift commandos from Beni to Baglung to engage the Maoists

The body of a policeman being carried to a helicopter on Monday afternoon

The charred remains of a man who was killed when a guest house belonging to a Nepali Congress worker was destroyed

Among the belongings of dead rebels were pictures of loved ones

Superpower polls

The coming election in the United States is one of the most crucial battles ever fought in this country, not to mention in the wider world.

It's not often that the contenders for power in a US presidential election offer such starkly different views and policies. It's not often—perhaps not since the American civil war in the 1800s—that politics has so

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



fiercely divided this land.

And in the rest of the world, it's unprecedented that so many leaders of other countries actually feel they have a stake in the outcome of this vote.

In Spain, a horrible terrorist attack underlines this on the eve of national elections and the people vote for a party that takes a strongly anti-American line, or, at least, an anti-Bush administration line. America was an election issue in Spain. If and when Britain's crumbling Blair government takes its policies to the people this year, relations with the US government will be a key election issue. France agrees on its long-standing anti-American line, somewhat repaired at the moment by cooperation over Haiti.

It's plain. The world despises President Bush. A significant percentage of Germans think his government actually planned the

America is too much of a world power for its election to be left solely to the Americans



9/11 tragedy. In country after country, people tell pollsters that George W Bush and his cabinet team actively lied about Iraq to force the Middle East into war. Israel remains a notable exception to this, naturally enough, given that its interests—understandably—lay in the toppling of Saddam Hussein.

Democratic party challenger Senator John Kerry has already said that various figures from other countries are quietly supporting his campaign. This is true. Most

of Europe, Asia, Canada and Latin America would love to see Kerry take the White House in November. Even those countries helping the US in occupying Iraq, Poland, Korea and Japan, are fed up with the current state of things in Washington. Australia's John Howard, mini Bush to his laconic countrymen, might be an exception here. But he's the exception that proves the rule.

Just what the hell is going on? It all depends on your point of view. If you're a supporter of the current American

government, it's all too clear. The world is losing its nerve. Jabbering, cowardly liberals are running amok in the media. Enemies lurk behind every rock, most of them bearded and wearing turbans. America can only trust America and even then, that half of the country that supports the current government.

If you're from John Kerry's side of the spectrum, you see a dangerous, unpredictable and arrogant regime with its eye on the prize of a second term in office. You see international alliances in tatters, America distrusted around the world and a corporate culture of greed and grab, so long as you pay off the Republican Party. Your followers agree and battle is joined.

I have said it in this column before that American elections are too important to be left only to Americans. The current deep rift over the Bush administration underscores this point. People in the US do not vote anymore. Turnout is usually less than 30 percent in presidential polls and important issues of foreign policy or the environment rarely drive the vote. I have a radical proposal.

Give the world a vote in America. Perhaps not one person, one ballot, but some form of say over an electoral contest that effects the fate of the planet. It won't wash in Peoria, but Pokhara and Potsdam just might welcome it. ●

like the sea...



from p1

The rebel force had started infiltrating the town at about 8:30, just after the curfew. The attack itself started at 10:30, when the mortar and automatic rifle fire started from the hills above. Local people said that it came as a complete surprise and there had been no sign of preparation inside the town. A witness, who asked not to be named, describes watching the rebels operating in the street below his home. "Half-an-hour after it started, the place was full of Maoists," he says. "They were carrying bombs that way, and carrying casualties back."

Beni's citizens shut themselves inside their homes, hiding under beds to the sounds of gunfire and explosions all night and into the next morning. While the fighting raged along the road leading to the CDO's office, the police station and the barracks, the rest of the town was under complete Maoist control.

"The children were watching

the Maoists running in the streets below," said one eye witness. "They were a little afraid at first but after that they watched in fascination. The Maoists were taking time to eat chow chow and asking for drinking water from the houses. They didn't do anything to the public."

The Maoists were carrying pressure cookers as assault charges, on long bamboo poles to be placed against the walls of their targets. Casualties were carried back on stretchers and in *dokos*. Some Maoists took medical supplies from a local pharmacy to treat the wounded.

"Until ten the next morning they were moving around freely," said another eye witness. "One Maoist was even carrying messages back and forth by bicycle. After the sun came up, they were walking here like they were coming home from a movie. Singing, joking, showing no fear."

The witnesses said they saw up to 70 casualties, either dead or injured. The children were used at night, but by morning they had been replaced by adult fighters.

"The children were like 14-15 years old," said another resident.

At around 8:30 on Sunday morning a witness in the bazar saw 10-15 of the captured policemen being led away to the north with their hands tied behind their backs.

Towns people said a helicopter flew over Beni at around 2AM, but it couldn't do much. The fighting was house-to-house and in the middle of the town, which is located at the bottom of a deep gorge. Attacking from the air, would have meant heavy civilian casualties. It was not till 9 o'clock on Sunday morning that the Maoists began to move off and the army's helicopters returned to chase them away. But the first helicopter landed at the parade ground on the banks of Kali Gandaki only on Sunday afternoon.

The army says many rebels were killed by the helicopters that pursued them, and at one point the entire hill above Beni was in flames as the aerial strafing of fleeing Maoists continued. Helicopters were landing regularly by Monday, whipping up blinding dust storms



on the parade ground. They were flying in fresh troops and picking up others for the cordon and search operations that seemed to be concentrated to the south of Beni.

Even on Monday, the people of Beni looked shellshocked. Some were cautiously venturing outdoors, looking at the damage. Opposite the CDO's office stood the house of Netra Bahadur Mahat, a Nepali Congress activist, which was used as a guest house. The Maoists had come and taken everyone out and set fire to the building. Two people who were hiding inside were burnt to death, their charred remains still inside the ruins of the house.

Not far away, next to the army camp is a school. Its furniture and doors were broken and the walls pock-marked with bullet holes. A few children had begun returning to investigate the damage to their classrooms. Behind one the Maoists had left a socket bomb and an assault charge the size of a football.

Among the weapons and clothes left behind by the Maoists were three photo albums retrieved from the pockets of dead Maoists. They showed mothers and fathers, pictured outside their village homes. Smiling young people stood in fields wearing Dasain garlands. There is a picture of a handsome young man, posing on a boat at Phewa Lake. Other pictures were of Maoists posing together, smiling and brandishing weapons. One photo showed a young woman holding a bunch of flowers and, on the facing page, a young man's conventional studio shot, with 'I love you' written across it in English.

The last remaining bodies of security personnel were being ferried out by helicopter on Monday afternoon, but the bodies of the Maoists still lay rotting in the ditches and along the roads. Human rights observers and reporters had started arriving, and there were reports coming in from outlying villages that civilians were among those killed



as helicopter gunships fired at retreating Maoists.

The operations were still going on and there was a lot of helicopter activity. At the parade ground, a group of grim faced commandos was climbing aboard an Mi-17 bound for Baglung. A group of women wailed from the edge of the field as the bodies of dead police and soldiers were being loaded up for the flight to Pokhara.

Outside Pokhara airport on Monday police and army families were crouching in the shade, watching the bodies being unloaded from the helicopters. There was bomb damage to a bridge along the road and the trees felled across the way were still being cleared. In a village along the road, a funeral was being prepared. ●



KANAK MANI DIXIT



NEPALNEWS.COM

Ill advised

Some unsolicited advice before King Gyanendra's Pokhara address

Last week *The Independent* reported that the former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, was advised wrongly in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalitions forces. Apparently the advisers led Saddam to believe that the Americans would never be able to take over Baghdad. They were soon to be proven wrong.

On Sunday, King Gyanendra will receive yet another civic reception in Pokhara. His advisers must be busy checking the final draft of yet another royal address to the nation. The events so far have proved that the king is being misled by his advisers, though it would be important to recognise

that it was the king himself who picked them. So, as it has happened, the blame has largely fallen on the king himself, not on the advisers.

The king has surrounded himself by the likes of Marich Man Singh and Sharad Chandra Shah, both staunchly royalist but highly discredited Panchayati stalwarts. What can one expect when he has chosen to be advised by such blinkered horses?

This columnist modestly believes that he is more open and objective than Singh and Shah. Hence, from the perspective of distance, it may make sense to provide some unsolicited advice from London on the eve of the Pokhara address:

a) Kathmandu's rumour mill has it that the king may announce general elections in Pokhara. That will be yet another mistake. The announcement of the general elections at present is only likely to further complicate the situation.

Just because the king has been visiting the district headquarters amidst heavy security does not mean that it is safe for polls. Even if they are held in phases as the Home Minister, Kamal Thapa, repeatedly emphasises, they are not likely to produce democratic results.

b) In terms of PR, it may be wiser to announce the establishment of a charitable trust from the assets left behind by his beloved brother, Birendra, and his family. This may actually redress some of the damage to the institution of monarchy in Nepal.

c) The king must be realistic in choosing the words of his speech. One can deceive some people for some time, but not all the people all the time. So far he has limited himself only to rhetorical statements which have gradually brought him down to the level of other political leaders.

d) The sooner the king accepts the importance of political parties as indispensable democratic institutions the better it is. He should not be cynical about them when so much cynicism is growing about his own role. Trying to make political capital out of their weaknesses was, is and will be a blunder.

e) The politics of civic receptions must stop. The king and his coterie have always suffered from political myopia and the latest moves are just the latest example. On the one hand, they have consistently hampered the institutionalisation of the state as a democratic and progressive entity, while on the other, gradually discredited the monarchy.

f) By deliberately sidelining the democratic forces, the king is playing a dangerous political game, which will be long-drawn and which he will never win. If he does not lose, it may be his son who will. And when that happens, the outcome will not be as tame as in 1990.

None of the king's advisers, nor Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, can be expected to give this kind of advice. These royal puppets have outlived their usefulness in pursuing their personal ambitions. There are scores of other true monarchists in Nepal who are genuinely concerned about the longevity of this institution and could provide far more valuable counsel. It just requires King Gyanendra himself to keep an open mind.

Pokhara not in the mood

Pokhara's welcome for the king and queen is overshadowed by Beni

RAMESH POUDEL in POKHARA

Preparations for the public felicitation ceremony for King Gyanendra and Queen Komal in Pokhara on Sunday has been overshadowed by the heavy casualties in the battle of Beni last week.

Even as helicopters bringing in casualties of security personnel and civilians are still arriving at Pokhara, and gunships climb off to the west to attack Maoist positions, pickups bedecked with banners are exhorting the people of this tourist town with loudspeakers to welcome the king and queen. The people of Pokhara look somber and seem divided about whether the felicitation should go ahead.

The king and queen will be staying at the royal residence at Ratna Mandir by the banks of Phewa Lake and this is also the entrance to the main tourist area. Security is already very tight.

The Maoists, as is their practice, have already declared a two-day

banda on Saturday and Sunday to prevent people from coming for the ceremony which will be held at the stadium. In neighbouring Lekhnath Municipality, the scene of numerous Maoist attacks in recent months, the rebels declared their "Peoples' government" last week.

Reports reaching here said a convoy of vehicles, including those from the palace, being escorted by helicopters along the Prithibi Highway to Pokhara was shot at by Maoists at Jamune in Tanahu. Rebels have been repeatedly forcing the 1,057-member felicitation committee to resign.

Meanwhile, local newspapers and FM stations have focused on the Myagdi clash and the human toll. In such an atmosphere, people are in a confused state of mind. "I would like to take part in the felicitation program," said Pramod Sharma, a local entrepreneur in Lekhnath Municipality. "But I am scared that rebels may do something."

That there is local support for the felicitation can also be seen from the fact that people have made financial contributions for the event from businesses.

But some believe this is not the right time for felicitation. "How can you have one at a time like this?" asks Srijana Adhikari in Pokhara Bazar. Leaders of the agitating political parties are equally vocal. "This is not the time when the king should choose to be felicitated," said Rabindra Adhikari and Shukra Raj Sharma, local leaders of the UML and Nepali Congress.

The local authorities, however, claim that preparations have been finalised, and security arrangements are in place and the people have no reason to worry. "There is no compromise in security arrangements and that is why people are quite excited to take part in the felicitation," says Acting Regional Administrator Bodh Raj Adhikari. ●



SUDARSAN RANJIT

Khaobadis in Hong Kong

HONG KONG — The Hong Kong authorities have arrested two men for publishing a 'hit list' in an alleged attempt to blackmail prominent members of the Nepali community there. The list names 20 Nepali businessmen, diplomats, airline officials and security guards as main 'enemies' and it was published last year in the name of Maoist rebels. It threatened those it named with violence, including being "fractured to death".

But, police investigation showed that the men were common thugs and were not associated to any terrorist organisation, according to the South China Morning Post newspaper. Early investigations had indicated that the list may have been prepared to fund the Maoist movement. The list was circulated under the letterhead of a group calling itself the Special Group Command and it was titled 'Hit List for Hong Kong' naming people including

the staff of the Royal Nepal consulate and Royal Nepal Airlines and the editor of the *Nepal* newspaper. The document read: "Our attention is concentrated on Hong Kong because we are getting more evidence that our comrades are facing many problems. Some people who are working as agents against our peaceful people's war are regarded as our main enemy and listed."

The release of the hit list last October had caused widespread alarm among intelligence analysts because the listing of the names indicated that the Maoist insurgency had widened even outside the borders of Nepal. The Organised Crime and Triad Bureau has been investigating the extent of support for the Maoist rebels in Hong Kong and the possible presence of any hit squads. So far, they have found no link between the rebels and any group in Hong Kong.

Between Bhojpur and Beni

Within a fortnight, Maoist rebels have carried out two dramatic attacks on district headquarters: Bhojpur and Beni. Both the Maoists and the government have claimed victory. Hundreds of people were killed, but both sides won!

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



The attacks have seriously exposed the level of rift and lack of cooperation among the government's security agencies which might have implications much more damaging than the two attacks themselves. And the Maoists don't seem to have realised yet that capturing state power is not possible without the people's voluntary participation. That alone can preserve what residual political identity the party still has.

Let's look at Beni. From what is known so far, police armed with only .303s were attacked by overwhelming numbers of Maoists with automatic weapons and mortars. Even while the police were cut down, the army did not act until its own barracks were attacked later that night. During the six-hour-long pitched battle between the police and the guerrillas, night vision helicopters hovered overhead but retreated.

The entire district headquarters were overrun and the government's moral and physical defeat became quite obvious when the head of both the district police and civil administration were abducted along with 30 others. However, the impression that the government tried to give was: since the army brigade could not be overrun, the Maoists failed in their mission. By extension of

that logic, the government won. Even if that was said to put on a brave face, it is a claim few will believe.

Home Minister Kamal Thapa had to face unprecedented protests from police in Beni for their "heroic defeat" caused mainly by the absence of support from the army. The police face a predicament as they continue to be the number one target of the Maoists, and at the same time the military denies them proper training and equipment. This event will also send a strong and bitter political message in the background of the ongoing power tussle between the king and the pro-democracy political parties, especially in the context of their accusing the king that he may be trying to appropriate executive powers by counting on the army's loyalty.

No doubt, the political parties always adopted a myopic attitude towards the army as being loyal to the king and hostile toward them. They didn't even bother to support the legitimate defensive action by the army. But it is still equally important for the king to prove that the charge has no basis.

This perceived proximity of the king and the military, and the pent-up resentment among the police force attributed to the lack of cooperation from the army needs to be addressed immediately with a reconciliation between the king and the political parties in defence of the spirit of the constitution. That would also show a way out of the current impasse. The police force needs to be developed as an autonomous agency not having to play second fiddle to the army, which means the unified command principle needs to be

How long can the police sustain such heroic defeats?



Body of a man shot dead by the army on Monday lies on a street in Beni.

THOMAS BELL

reviewed. Only quick action will save the dangerous fallout of the Bhojpur and Beni fiascos from getting out of hand.

It may also be time for the king to reconsider his proposed

felicitation trip to Pokhara. There will be questions asked—why such extravaganzas when Nepalis are fighting and dying by the hundreds? The people will ask: doesn't the king, who took over

power in October 2002, now have the responsibility to set things right? It isn't too late for King Gyanendra to overrule members of his coterie by refusing to go to Pokhara. ●

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KIRAN PANDAY

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Not having an elected legislature and an elected prime minister is not just grist for the political parties in their 'anti-regression' agitation against the king. It has also thrown Nepal's accession to the WTO into new controversy.

Faced with the 31 March deadline for WTO accession, the government has hastily amended the Treaty Act through another royal ordinance. This has drawn fire from parties which accuse the government of trying to sideline parliament and

violate the constitution. "This is another striking example of just how undemocratic this government is," said UML General Secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal. "If they can amend an Act like that, they can do the same with any

Getting our Act together

Parties are up in arms about the government amending the Treaty Act to push through Nepal's WTO accession

constitutional provision." The government says the amendment was only to meet the WTO deadline. The Treaty Act requires parliament approval before any treaty is signed with an international body or foreign country. With the amendment in place, it is possible just by royal approval of a government recommendation.

"The amendment is only intended to allow our entrance into the WTO," Commerce and Industry Minister Hari Bahadur Basnet told us. "The words 'exclusively for the WTO' may not appear in the amendment, but that is what it is." WTO cell chief Prachanda Man Shrestha at the Ministry told us in an interview (see p 9) that all the effort for membership of the WTO would go down the drain if the deadline is not met with ratification.

Since Nepal is not a member of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT), it had to negotiate with members of the WTO one by one and that took almost five years before membership was approved last September.

WTO pundits agree that Nepal must not miss the bus. They say that internal political wrangling should not hold the membership hostage. "We cannot afford to do that," says Ratnakar Adhikari, a WTO expert from the group, South Asia Watch on Trade and Environment (SAWTE). "If we fail to ratify the accession in time, it would be disastrous for our economy."

Former lawmakers of the agitating political parties argue the issue is beyond economy and that it raises doubts on the government's true intentions. "Because they did not even bother to hold discussions with us on such a serious issue, we have reasons to be suspicious," said Upper House member of the Nepali Congress and professional lawyer, Radheshyam Adhikari.

Upper House members of the agitating political parties had even jointly demanded an Upper House session for ratification. The session would not only have discussed the prospects and risks for Nepal in the WTO, but would have also demonstrated the government's commitment toward democracy. "But, the government chose to avoid such a democratic way revealing its real character," said Adhikari.

Ministry officials see no reason

to politicise the issue like this since safeguards have been built into the amendment with a clause that says it is only for joining international organisations and not for bilateral treaties like river sharing projects with India.

They say the amendment also has a mandatory provision that the government must notify the House of Representatives within seven days of its formation about the changes made. And, if the dates for elections are announced, the changed provision will be null and void.

Meanwhile, officials at the Commerce and Industry Ministry this week were flipping over the pages of international treaties like the Vienna Convention to make sure that the ratification through the ordinance would not be challenged in court.

As far as the WTO is concerned, experts believe it is unlikely that the global body will be interested in knowing the mechanism of ratification as long as it is ratified. "The WTO would not be bothered in the ways adopted for the ratification," said Posh Raj Pandey, a UNDP adviser. SAWTE's Adhikari agrees: "All that it needs is the ratification by the state. Whether the ratification is done through the parliament or any other mechanism is not WTO's business."

Even so, it is clear that the government could have toned down the parties' opposition to ratification by royal ordinance if it had consulted them. Nearly all the main parties have supported Nepal's entrance into the WTO when they were in power. But the way things are done, the parties are angry and may pose problems when (and if) the parliament sits again. "We are not going to take any responsibility if something goes wrong due to the WTO accession in the future," said UML's Nepal. "This government will have to take all the blame."

The opposition of the political parties seems to be less about the practical disadvantages of a rules-based trading regime and how it would hurt the world's poorer countries and more about opposing a royal appointed government. Their argument: If the government has made amendments in an Act through ordinance today, it can also change any provision in the constitution in the days to come. They say that is the real threat to democracy. ●

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KIRAN PANDAY

WTO deadline: 31 March

Prachanda Man Shrestha heads the WTO cell at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and has been at the forefront of Nepal’s negotiations with bilateral partners before entering the global trade regime. He explains to the *Nepali Times* how difficult that job is.

Nepali Times: Where are we in the process of getting into the WTO?
Prachandra Man Shrestha: Since we were not a founder member of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT), we had to finalise the terms of the WTO membership with each member. That took a lot of time. Even after we submitted the complete document in 1998, it took us four years to get through the formalities. After the bilateral meetings in Geneva in 2003, the protocol of accession was ready. Our accession to the WTO was unanimously endorsed by all 146 countries in the fifth WTO ministerial meet in Cancun of Mexico. We were given the deadline till 31 March to endorse or ratify the WTO package we have received. Since last September, we have carried out a public debate on the package we have received. So far, no one has called it a bad deal.

But we don’t have a parliament to ratify the deal.
Our constitution has a provision for making laws in absence of the House of Representatives and we have done so in the past 14 years. In case of WTO, if we are required to join it within a certain deadline, we can bring the ordinance accordingly. But we have been cautious enough not to hamper the democratic system. If the House of Representatives, after it comes into being, finds that the WTO package was not the right deal, it can still take action. The ratification had to be done through the amendment because we have the 31 March deadline. If we fail to do so, we will be putting our country’s credibility at stake.

But the politicians have been saying the amendment was unconstitutional and that ratification could have been done through the Upper House.
Despite the provision in the Treaty Act, we could not get the ratification done through the House of Representatives because it is not there right now. But we are running out of time for ratification. After intensive discussion with legal professionals, we decided to make the amendment in the Treaty Act through ordinance so that ratification is possible. The additional clause in the Act will be applicable only in case international organisations join, which have to be multilateral and that means only the WTO. The amendment also has a mandatory provision that we notify the House of Representatives within seven days of its formation about the changes made. If dates for elections are announced, this provision will be null and void. That is how we have tried to maintain the spirit of the Act and the constitution.

How exactly does Nepal benefit from being a member?
In very simple language, we are now part of a permanent international trade system. The WTO also enhances the capacities of least developed countries and using its resources the WTO can improve service delivery so business becomes more competitive. There will be stability in policies under the WTO framework. Least Developed Countries (LDC’s) have suffered from unstable policies and that has scared off investors.

But WTO is under fire for being unfair to poor countries.
In any international organisation, countries of similar status do lobby for their own interests. WTO is no exception. In the last few years, we have seen that developed and developing countries have been voicing their respective interests. We believe compromise is possible. Of course, there are many debatable and arguable issues within the WTO. But, there is no better institution at the global level. Therefore, we have got to try to maximise benefits of membership, we can’t do without it.

Does that mean we will have to rely on others?
In Cancun last September, a group of developing countries could speak against what they claimed the cartel of developed countries for their interests. There is a separate sub-committee of the least developed countries. It has put forth the common demands and requirements of LDCs. If we were out of WTO, we could have never done that.

The private sector says the government is not capable of handling WTO membership by itself.
That is a valid observation. In WTO negotiations, the government is supposed to represent the country and the private sector cannot take part directly. Therefore, there has to be a private-government linkage. So far, we have been taking the suggestions of the private sector and other stakeholders on an ad hoc basis. We need to develop a permanent mechanism for such input to be raised at the WTO.

Bandas and blockades

Let’s delink economics from politics

The Beed has overheard plans to organise car and motorcycle rallies during the next banda. Over the past two months much has been written

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



about how bandas have crippled life and its economic impact, but perhaps no one has come forward with such a radical idea. It could worth be a try. The banda psychosis fits in well with the lazy and escapist Nepali lifestyle, and is secretly more than welcome in some quarters.

Government offices tell you to collect documents after the next banda and card game lovers cannot resist the lure of the next hartal. But the most interesting is that the hotel people, who were crying foul on tourism decline due to banda calls, are now ganging up to organise a strike. They want the government to dole out subsidies to them to be able to pay outstanding bank loans.

The lesson for neo-socialists to learn: in a market driven economy, if one cannot repay debt obligations, then one should turn to the government. If the government doesn’t oblige, then threaten to call a strike. And we say we are an economy ready for WTO, SAFTA and BIMSTEC. Wake up.

The trading psyche of Nepali business has never been upset by bandas or blockades, rather it has provided more arbitrage opportunities to make that extra rupee. The vegetable vendors in Kalimati as well as the adulterated fuel gas stations, always pray for that landslide in *Krishna bhiror* the strike by any organisation—as long as life comes to a standstill. Business that thrives on capitalising opportunistic nuances has served to further bandas. If the business community came forward to try and address these issues without really looking at their own self interests, things would be different.

Blockades also bring about the need to look at supply chain management that has never been an issue of focus for most businesses. Issues of alternative highways, more connecting roads or more aircraft for the national carrier therefore should not be ignored as these are the times when one wishes there were alternatives. Surely, the government cannot ignore these issues either.

It is time to take a serious look at what the real impact of such bandas or blockades on the economy is. There is a socio-cultural side to what image we are really selling about Nepal and Nepalis. We need to learn from the Indian state of West Bengal



KIRAN PANDAY

including Kolkata, which, despite all liberalisation moves it is making, has yet to get rid of the stereotype image it sowed in the 1970s as a city with more non-working days than working days. Despite great improvements over the past decade it has yet to shed that image.

In the tourist or the economic map of the world, Nepal does not want that reputation. While political issues may take its own course on settlement, the economic agenda should be de-linked by all. Surely, the business community has a great role to play in this. Hello, hoteliers. ●

BIZ NEWS

Social security

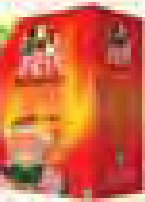
For the first time in Asia, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is launching a national campaign on social security and coverage in Nepal. The campaign aims at raising awareness on social protection among stakeholders including the government, employers, workers organisations, the civil society and donor agencies.

The ILO is holding a technical round table discussion and a national conference this week in Kathmandu. The ILO office in Kathmandu says the campaign is in line with the government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy and is also aimed at contributing towards building consensus among different quarters to extend social security coverage among working people particularly in the informal economy. Of the country’s 11 million workers, less than 0.4 percent are employed in the formal economy which is covered by some form of social security. Agriculture, which is Nepal’s largest contributor to the economy, is almost entirely informal.

NEW PRODUCTS

SAFE DEPOSITS: NCC bank has introduced the “Bal Suraksha Khata” scheme to secure today’s children’s futures. The initial deposit of Rs 2,500 has a one percent higher interest rate than usual, and is operated by the child’s guardians. On reaching maturity, the account is converted into an ordinary savings account. Another NCC innovation is the “NCC Savings Plus” scheme, providing interest on the basis of daily deposits with no specific required deposit amounts. Both schemes are accompanied by free medical coverage and accident coverage.

NEW CONDITIONS: With the arrival of summer comes the National Panasonic Air Conditioner. Famous for durability and low power consumption, the offer includes spare parts and after-sales services with any of the four attractive models.




PACKAGE-LIFT: 200gm of Upahar Tea is now available in an attractive new pack, designed to give consumers a “new, stimulating and refreshing feeling”. Also included is an attractive gift coupon, and of course the same old flavour and strength of good tea.


IFB INVASION: A tide of new products accompanies IFB’s entry into the Nepali market. Included are IFB Washing Machines, which are fully automatic and basically amount to having a full-scale laundry at home. The range also includes the IFB Dishwasher, which boasts a capacity of upto 95 utensils, a hygienic hot wash and goes easy on the water. Their 100% Cloth Dryer is sure to make those monsoon months much easier, but by far the most stylish offerings are from the “looks hot, cooks hot” range of IFB microwaves. These come in a variety of different sizes, with all the usual cooking options, but also include the latest lightweight technology and even built in FM radios.



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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Silence: geniuses at work

Everyone benefited from an artists' retreat at Nagarjun

SRADDHA BASNYAT

At the serene jungle retreat of Osho Tapoban in the Nagarjun hills west of Kathmandu, a group of 13 Nepali artists, writers and musicians gathered last week for the five-day workshop called (modestly) Genius at Work.

The organiser was Sutra, a group that is trying to bring renowned Nepali artists together to bridge the generation gap and cross-pollinate ideas. In the process their simple and innovative approach kept participants interested and thoroughly entertained. The experience, for most, was an entirely new one.

Writer and satirist Krishna Murari Gautam (alias Chatyang Master) was ecstatic. "The workshop gave me a chance to cleanse my mind," he told us. "It was a great opportunity to know what others are doing, painting, sculpting and how I can help them be better and how they can help me be better. I feel enriched."

Sutra's prime mover, Ashmina Ranjit, also thought the experiment worked. "As younger artists we wanted to show respect to our gurus, know more about them and how they work. We wanted to know what is between their art and their art process," she said. Other members of the Sutra group include ceramic artist Kala Premi Shrestha, musician and freelance writer Sulil Subedi, painters Manish Shrestha and Sarita Dangol, graphic artist DP Upadhyaya and Sujana Chitrakar who teaches art at Kathmandu University.

The participants kept diaries in which they wrote down thoughts and feelings that arose during the five-day retreat. The only requirements were that they be completely honest and avoid dry accounts of what they did or what happened. "The purpose of this exercise was to help us and the participants understand their own and others' creative processes," explained Sutra member, Sujana Chitrakar.

Intoxicated by the jasmine delicately scenting the forest air, participants found their time at Tapoban a relaxing break from the tumult of their busy lives in the city. Some even commented on personal responses to the stark yet pleasant change of pace and lifestyle. Literary figure Khagendra Sangraula whose writing appears periodically in the *Kantipur* column *Kushan Kaka*, entertained the group with his musings while walking up the unending and agonisingly vertical stairs to reach the street or scramble down to the river just for a smoke. Tapoban prohibits tobacco. "Khagendra Sangraula brought in the positive and the negative, all his moods. To me it was interesting how he put his thoughts and feelings into creation as a writer and this was our goal with the exercise," said Ranjit.

Though everyone was asked to write, the artist participants were given an activity of their own. Each had a small piece of canvas to work with. Initially, some like Sankar Raj Singh Suwal were annoyed and demanded a larger canvas. But when he proceeded to paint on several long, rectangular

pieces of canvas placed several inches apart from each other, the results were stunning: swirls of turquoise blues and emerald greens and a relief Buddha sitting in meditation fixed into a ball of light to the left of the painting (see pic). For the others, it was interesting to watch him work. "He was forced to think differently. The first step was to break the shape, a challenge he accepted. These were the kind of immediate result we were looking for," noted Ranjit.

Sashi Kala Tiwari, known for her vibrant expressions on canvas, had a different experience. On pieces of canvas resembling a rectangle cut in half diagonally, she painted two fallen leaves. "Nature was alive and all around, so I took the leaves and gave them their own identity to show that their existence is still very strong," she explains. When asked whether the oddly shaped canvas presented a challenge, she replies: "It's not about shape. It's about expression. It's about how you put yourself in the paper, poem, canvas. Everything else is minor." For Tiwari, most of the results of the workshop will be long-term, realised as her subconscious releases bits at a time. For now she appreciates young artists wanting to learn from her own experiences. She hopes they find a new road to call their own.

Non-artists and artists alike, all enjoyed the retreat. Artist and cartoonist Durga Baral learned new ways to solve problems in his work by seeing how other artists work, understanding the philosophy behind what they do. ●

Simply soul

Vipassana is pure, simple, undiluted, devoid of dogma, rituals and commercialism

Good, bad, ugly and zillions of other adjectives try to define the human and inhuman qualities that reside in all of us. This would be obvious if we were to just stop and watch the number and nature of thoughts that go whizzing through our minds every moment of the day. The mind is so mega-faceted that it creates

a universe out of every individual. Emotions and the resulting reactions come and go inside out heads all the time.

Most of us, unaware of this natural process, continue to react blindly to the sensations that we ultimately translate to likes and dislikes, wants and not wanting. These desires can be summarised into two categories: attachment and aversion. Attachment to objects, people, feelings and incidents that make you feel good, and aversion towards the same that make us feel uncomfortable or miserable.

How many of us can honestly say that we are happy and peaceful, regardless of the situation we may be in? In reality we are constantly swinging from one end of the pendulum to the other. Perhaps there are rare moments when the pendulum centres itself and the mind is balanced and free of fear. These moments are still moments when the mind feels peace, and joy flows in the blood stream.

The heart knows. Every cell of our body retains memories, experiences. It stores every thought that we indulge in by reacting to the thoughts. The human body is blessed with awareness, it has inbuilt wisdom. Treated right and listened to, it can be your best ally.

Think about the gut feeling that you ignored, only to suffer the consequence of not having followed the warning, or the conscience that screamed at you not to say or do certain things that you pushed aside and ended up having to pay a heavy price for later. Our minds and bodies naturally follow the laws of nature, we instinctively know what is right for us and others without having anybody telling us. We do not need a university degree to know that we must not harm others or ourselves, that we must treat others as we would like to be treated.

So what would be a way to learn to be balanced, be free from fear and remain calm amidst life's storms? How can we be free from suffering?

I found my answer after learning the Vipassana meditation technique. It showed me the way to be focused in the present, to be free from the burdens of the past and worries of the future. Vipassana is pure, simple, undiluted. It is devoid of dogma, rituals and commercialism. It teaches you to look inwards and watch yourself constantly in your thoughts, speech and actions.

It teaches meditation as a way of life that you practice at all times: while sitting with your eyes closed and in every act of living. The two veins have to run parallel concurrently, for your spiritual heart to beat. One doesn't work without the other. There are times when I will fall down hard and suffer. But now I have learned to pick myself up and start walking again. Now I know the way. And I also know that I will go just as far as I walk, not more, not less. It's as simple as that. ●



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NARESH NEWAR

Most Nepalis are used to seeing the comedy duo Madan Krishna Shrestha and Haribangsa Acharya on television. Few know that they also have a radio show.

Maha (Madan and Hairbangsa) star in a 10-minute radio drama *Adalat*, which go to the roots of social, political and economic conflicts in Nepali society. But as usual, Maha don't do it in a preachy and moralistic way, but rather with humour and entertainment.

The two are back together in radio after 17 years, and the thanks for that goes to the production house, Antenna, which was started by a group of radio journalists. The brain child of Manisha Aryal, a print-turned-radio journalist, Antenna is making waves by shoring up the public service broadcasting model in the country.

"Listening to FM stations, you get the feeling radio presenters, especially the DJs, don't treat Nepali listeners as intelligent people," says Aryal. This is why she wanted to start something new and different by turning Nepali audience into not only listeners, but also active participants in debates and discussions.

Since its launch in 2002, Antenna has proved to be one of the most successful radio production companies in the country with its weekly radio magazine, *Chhinophano*, that reaches millions of Nepalis in cities and villages throughout Nepal.

Nepal has now established itself as a pioneer of community radio worldwide. Local broadcasters in towns and villages across Nepal have shown that public service broadcasting is alive and well in the country. And others have taken notice.

Nepal's new community FM broadcasters are gradually promoting the public service broadcasting culture pioneered by Radio Sagarmatha in Kathmandu, which was the first private community radio station of South Asia when it started in 1997.

What makes Antenna's *Chhinophano* an important addition to this trend is the presentation by Nepal's most popular humorists and satirists like the Chatyang Master and the Maha duo. The producers keep experimenting with the structure of the program to make it more relevant to the listeners.

Chhinophano reaches listeners in the eastern, central, western and far western regions of Nepal through Radio Nepal's central and regional transmission centers and through Radio Nepal's six FM



MIN BAJRACHARYA



Manisha Aryal (l), and Madan Krishna and Haribangsa recording their radio program *Adalat* in the studio.

stations around the country. It also reaches listeners in eastern, central and western Nepal through a network 10 of NGO or cooperative-run and commercial FM radio stations. Since January 2004, it has also started to reach British Gurkha soldiers stationed in different parts

of the world through British Forces' Broadcasting Services' V-Sat links.

Antenna's latest venture has been to produce *Business Yatra*, specifically targeted at the Kathmandu audience with information on money and business. "We decided to produce *Business*

Yatra because we felt existing business programs on radio and television do not do justice to economic issues. They tend to be full of jargon and rarely explain why businesses and consumers should care about a particular piece of government legislation, inter-

linkages amongst economic activities or an entrepreneur's vision," adds Aryal. ●

Chhinophano airs on Radio Nepal every Saturday evening 7:30-8:00 pm
Business Yatra is on Radio Sagarmatha 102.4FM every Thursday morning at 8:00 am

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Something that he

Govinda's story



HAPPIER TIMES: Govinda Mainali outside the restaurant where he worked in Tokyo.

The conviction, imprisonment and the rejection of an appeal of a Nepali prisoner accused of the murder of a Japanese woman has raised serious questions about Japan's justice system.

Govinda Mainali was accused of raping and killing Yasuko Watanabe, a manager at the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) who lead a double life and worked as a prostitute after working hours. On 19 March 1997, Watanabe's decomposing body was found in an empty room in the same building where Mainali and other Nepalis lived in Tokyo's Shibuya district.

She had been strangled 10 days previously. When the police came, most Nepalis fled because they thought it was an immigration raid against illegals. But Govinda turned himself in and said he didn't do it. Govinda's mistake was that he initially denied having known the woman and later admitted that he had paid for sex with Watanabe three times. The latest was ten days before the murder.

The police built up a case against Govinda, saying he had killed her for the 40,000 yen which other customers said they had paid her that evening. DNA analysis of the condom found in the room matched Govinda's and one Nepali said Govinda had

paid back a loan to him at the time of the killing.

The case came to trial in 2000, and the Tokyo District Court acquitted Govinda. He was getting ready to head back to Nepal when the Tokyo District Prosecutor's office filed an appeal at the High Court and Govinda was locked up again. On 22 December 2000, the court sentenced Govinda to life imprisonment.

Japanese legal activists have taken up the case and even set up a Justice for Govinda Innocence Advocacy Group. One of them is Mikiki Kyakuno who is convinced the Nepali is innocent and says the Japanese justice system has a "deep-rooted racial xenophobia".

Another Japanese who has taken up Govinda's case is writer Shinichi Sano, who wrote the best-selling book, *Office Lady Murder Case*. Sano visited Govinda in jail many times and even came to Nepal to meet his friends and family. "I never believed Govinda was guilty," Sano said in an interview with *Nepali Times* in 2001 in Tokyo (see: 'Govinda', #39). "Govinda was just a fall guy from a poor country that didn't dare to make a fuss to take all the blame." After Govinda's appeal to the Supreme Court was turned down in October, Sano wrote this passionate defence of Govinda's innocence.



SHINICHI SANO in TOKYO

On 22 October 2003, I was in Sapporo in Hokkaido when I heard that Govinda Mainali's appeal had been rejected by the Supreme Court. A reporter in Tokyo called me on my cell phone for reaction, and I trembled with anger. The ruling was totally unjust. Even though the District Court acquitted Govinda, the High Court continued sloppy deliberations with the presumption of guilt to come out with an unacceptable ruling of a life sentence, overturning the acquittal.

Starting next year, a series of reforms are to be introduced in the Japanese judicial system to allow for more participation of citizens. Govinda's ruling totally goes against that trend and is a travesty of justice. After the acquittal by the District Court in 2000, Govinda should have been deported immediately for illegal overstaying, but he was re-detained. Such action is unconstitutional and the rejection of the appeal now highlights the injustice of the whole procedure.

As someone who has followed this case closely, I maintain that there has been a serious miscarriage of justice and Govinda's case throws up many questions of judicial reforms in Japan not just for foreigners, but also for Japanese citizens. It also opens questions of docile Japanese journalists who are completely taken in by the power of authority and simply pass on their information through the media.

No Japanese reporters actually went to the Maruyamacho area of Shibuya Ward, where the murder took place. No reporters, except a

Nepali journalist in 2001, ever bothered to interview Govinda in the detention centre in Kosuge to hear his cries of innocence.

A song of hope

On 21 October when legal reporters, tipped off by the authorities were already writing their stories about the rejection by the Supreme Court, social activist Naomi Yoshikawa of the Justice for Govinda Group went to see Govinda. She had no idea about the Supreme Court verdict. At this time Govinda himself had not been notified of the decision.

The minute he saw Naomi, Govinda thanked her for writing out the lyrics of his favorite song in Roman letters and sending them to him. Govinda had mentioned that he liked the song '*Nada Sousou*' ('Tears trickling down') by an Okinawan singer, Rimi Natsukawa. Naomi had started visiting Govinda in March 2003 when she accompanied Radha, Govinda's wife, to Kosuge for a brief prison visit. When Govinda mentioned the song, Naomi said, "The song sounds like it's about you and Radha, doesn't it?" She later wrote out the lyrics and sent it, adding a message that said, "I hope the two of you can see each other again soon."

Naomi and Govinda talked about their families and their daughters. As always, Govinda was caring and considerate about others despite the stress of his incarceration. Govinda told Naomi that his elder daughter Mithila would like to be a doctor and he wants to make her

dream come true. Now, there was no point dreaming any more. Naomi told me: "It's too much to bear to think that what we did that day, talking about the hopes for the future, it might have made it even harsher for him to take in the shock. Naomi Yoshikawa told Govinda "See you next week, take care," waved goodbye and left the visitor's meeting room.

On the morning of the following day, 22 October, the defense counsel and the core members of the Justice for Govinda Innocence Advocacy Group went to see Govinda after learning from the media about the decision. The moment he saw them, Govinda showed the document declaring the Supreme Court decision by putting the sheet of paper against the transparent acrylic board dividing the visitors and detainees.

The rejection seems to have been cruelly timed for Govinda's

37th birthday which was on 21 October. Govinda sobbed incessantly, and said: "The Supreme Court is a place where the brightest people in Japan are, isn't it? And that court is sending an innocent man to jail? I haven't done anything wrong, how can I spend my life there? I won't be able to see my aging parents alive in this world anymore."

I called Urmila, Govinda's elder sister, in Nepal. I had seen her in Kathmandu a few years ago. Choking back tears, she said, "When a Japanese TV reporter called me, my hands started to shake and I couldn't say anything." She called her sister-in-law, Radha, in Ilam who wept on the phone, called out Govinda's name again and again. "I felt so sorry for my gentle brother," Urmila told me. "Govinda didn't do anything wrong. God knows the truth, now, I can only pray to God."

Govinda's brother Indra still hasn't recovered from the shock.

"When we heard the sad news, all went quiet in the house, nobody said anything," he told me. "Then everyone started crying at once. I couldn't stop crying, the tears just gushed out." Govinda's 76-year-old mother and 82-year-old father, Radha and the children, all wept bitterly. Neighbours heard the crying, and thinking someone had died, went in to find out what was happening. In the ten days after the Supreme Court verdict, Govinda got more than 300 letters from friends and strangers, who wanted to cheer him up.

The evidence

Yasuko Watanabe was a senior employee of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) by day, a prostitute by night who walked the streets of Shibuya. She disappeared on 8 March, her body was found in Room 101 of Kijyu-



DOUBLE LIFE: Yasuko Watanabe (left) walked the streets of Shibuya looking for customers from the immigrant community. The apartment where her body was found on 19 March, 1997.

never did

A Japanese author writes an impassioned plea for justice in the case of Nepali serving life imprisonment for murder in Tokyo



ANGRY AUTHOR: Japanese writer, Shinichi Sano, at his home in Tokyo reading from his book on Govinda Mainali..

KUNDA DIXIT

so apartment building in Maruyama-cho, on 19 March. In the toilet bowl of the apartment was a condom containing semen. The police determined that she was killed late during the night of 8 March and a DNA test was conducted on the semen, and this was determined to be Govinda's.

Govinda admitted to having sexual intercourse with Watanabe in that room on 28 February. But the police insisted that it happened on 8 March. This became the most critical piece of evidence in the trial and expert opinion was consulted regarding the degree of the deterioration of the individual spermatozoa.

The conclusion was that the head part and the tail part of the sperm were completely severed and that it would take more than 20 days for sperm to disintegrate like that. This corroborated Govinda's statement. However, the High Court accepted a supplementary opinion that contamination by E coli bacteria and cleaning liquid in the toilet bowl could have hastened the deterioration of the sperm. This became the sole piece of decisive evidence that supported the theory of Govinda as the perpetrator.

The defence counsel conducted an experiment in which it asked five Nepalis to provide sperm samples and put them in condoms, leaving them in the toilet bowl under identical conditions. The sperm disintegrated after 20 days.

If the reasoning of the High Court which sentenced Govinda

to life imprisonment, was correct it would have meant that Govinda had to have killed Watanabe on 8 March, after which he would have had to take a ride in a time machine to go back 10 days and discard his semen in the toilet. The Supreme Court supported such a ludicrous verdict.

Much of the circumstantial evidence was in favour of Govinda. For 11 days until Watanabe's body was found, he continued to live as usual in Room 401 of the Kasuya Building, down the hall from Room 101. Would a murderer do that? Govinda also had plenty of opportunities to flee the country after 8 March.

Three days after the body was found, Govinda voluntarily went to the Shibuya Police Station for questioning, fully aware of the risk of being arrested for overstaying his visa. This strongly suggests his innocence. The same can be said for Watanabe's commuter pass that was found in the yard of a private home in Sugamo, far away from the murder site, a week before the body was found.

Regarding this mystery of the commuter pass being found in a place where Govinda doesn't go, the District Court gave a fair judgment, concluding the possibilities that a perpetrator other than Govinda could be involved. However, the High Court flatly refused to take this as evidence.

Fallacy of infallibility

The Japanese police and judiciary are obsessed with the fallacy of

infallibility that once indicted, the suspect has to be convicted no matter what. The Supreme Court is no longer a place where the truth is patiently pursued and justice is fairly secured. It has turned into a place where the self-protection of the justice system and miscarriage of justice are hastily secured.

I went to see the former Chief Judge Toshio Takagi without any appointment. He was the one who overturned the District Court acquittal and sentenced Govinda to life in prison in 2000. Takagi retired from the Tokyo High Court in November 2001 and later became a professor at the Law Department of Teikyo University, lecturing on Criminal Law. I waited for him in front of his research office on the Hachioji campus of the university. When I greeted him as he came back from the classroom, he looked surprised for a moment, but quickly regained his composure.

I asked him how he felt about the Supreme Court rejecting Govinda's appeal. He answered, "The ruling is totally reasonable because the District Court ruling was wrong. Now that the decision is made, it means that the Supreme Court approved of my guilty judgment. This man strangled and killed a woman. There is nothing more to say, excuse me." And he shut the door.

Out of the total of six judges that took part in the consultation, there is one who was first for rejecting Govinda's re-detention and then retracted the decision. He

is Yasuhiro Muraki. In May 2001, exactly a year after Govinda's re-arrest, Muraki was himself detained by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department on charges of child prostitution, paying 20,000 yen to a 14-year-old girl. Muraki was later convicted on a violation of the Anti-Child Prostitution and Anti-Child Pornography Law. He was given a two-year sentence with a suspended sentence of five years. He was dismissed from the position of judge in an impeachment hearing, the first in 20 years.

A paedophile judge was among those who passed the verdict in Govinda's trial. This fact alone considerably damages the credibility of the judiciary. But the Supreme Court, the last-resort guardian of the law, took the lead in ratifying an act that can be described as a crime committed by the judiciary.

I went to see Muraki in Yokohama, where he lives in a newly built, high-end condominium near a train station along the Toyoko line. The entrance hall is equipped with fully automatic security locks. The elaborate security precautions, along with the inorganic exterior of the building, reminded me of the Tokyo Detention House which used to hold Govinda in custody.

Muraki himself answered the intercom. "I can't talk," he said and hung up. I could hear the sound of children's laughter in the background. Muraki had twin daughters. By a cruel twist of fate,

Govinda also has two adorable daughters. The younger daughter, Elisa, is turning 10 and was born just after Govinda came to Japan. He has never seen her.

The last visit

On 4 November 2003, I went to see Govinda at the Tokyo Detention House. Wearing a white zip-up jacket, Govinda appeared in the interview cell. He looked unexpectedly well, his face had colour, but his hair which was full at the time of his arrest had now receded.

"I didn't do it. I'm innocent and in jail, is it because I am from a poor country like Nepal? Mr Sano, please help me," Govinda said.

Now that Govinda has been transferred to a maximum security prison, only family members are allowed to visit and only once a month. But Govinda's family lives in Nepal. Who is going to visit him?

In an effort to save Govinda, his defense counsel wasted no time in getting ready for filing a request for a retrial. However, judging from the precedence, chances are slim. Govinda's cries of innocence will likely be muffled in prison until the day of his parole, which can take up to 20 years. By that time he will be 60 years old. Govinda will have grandchildren without having seen his daughter's husbands. His Nepali mother and father will have passed away, deeply cursing Japan, a country which framed their son for a crime he did not commit.

Musical manifestos for peace



In a unique project, popular Nepali musicians have put children's peace poems into song and will sing together at a charity concert

MIN BAJRACHARYA

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Last year Santoshi Darlami's dream came true. She had always wanted to see her father's birthplace at Baseri Eko Tol, just a couple of hours by bus out of Kathmandu. Then, on a week-long school vacation, she finally went. That's when she realised, living in Kathmandu, she had no idea what was happening in the rest of the country.

"My uncle's daughter was killed by a bomb. She was only in class two and very talented. I saw what was happening in the rest of the country, I understood what people were going through," said 16-year-old Santoshi calmly. When she was given the chance to write a poem for a nationwide competition she knew

exactly what her poem would be called: Shanti. Now her poem has been woven into song by the teen heartthrobs of Aastha Band.

Back in Kathmandu, countless other stories of death and violence moved Sangeeta Thapa into action. "Over the years I've been hearing about thousands of children being out of school and many thousands more being abducted. So we got this idea to have children write poems and paint so they could pour out their feelings," said Thapa, director of Siddhartha Art Gallery.

That was almost three years ago. The gallery hooked up with World Peace Propagation Forum (WPPF), and through the forum's network of over 400 schools across the country and with coordination efforts by GTZ, CWIN and

orphanages like Happy Home, children were asked to write and paint about peace. Their work was collected and brought out as *Shanti: Children's Manifesto for Peace*.

Last year the manifesto was circulated to all political parties and reached the prime minister's desk. In April 2003, Siddhartha Art Gallery and WPPF exhibited the children's work based on the theme 'a hope for peace'.

The manifesto was then presented to 13 Nepali musicians, each of whom selected a poem and agreed to compose and arrange a song from it. Raman Shrestha of Samjhana Audio & Video and Dewakar Pandey of ournepal.com organised the artists and are now working to release the CD and music video. The group song took the longest to coordinate.

The album, *Shanti ko Sapana*, will be released at a benefit concert this weekend at the BICC and the children are ecstatic. Some are class 10 students like Bigya Shah is are having a hard time concentrating on the upcoming SLC exams. "I'm so excited I can't describe it," 16-year-old Bigya exclaims. Meeting the singer (*see pic*) didn't do anything to calm her down.

Bigya's is the only poem in English. A student at St Mary's, she says she wrote *I Wish My Dream Would Come True* to address the need for peace: "Nepali children are suffering mentally and physically. People need to stop the violence because it's impacting the children, our future, negatively. Peace deserves everyone's attention."

Bajracharya had become disillusioned with charity work, seeing no tangible benefits from past performances. But this one is different, he says. Despite being one of the most popular male singers in the Nepali music scene and having a busy recording schedule for his new album, Bajracharya managed to compose and arrange a song from Bigya's poem himself. Since it was not written as the lyrics to a song, Bajracharya admits it was a



KIRAN PANDAY

challenge: "I've added my guitar touch so it's rhythmic and people can dance to it. Technically, it's been a revolution for me." He's so pleased, he wants to perform the song again.

Bajracharya is also performing a second song from a poem written by Mahendra Raj Karki, a student from Bhaktapur, which has become the title song of the event. Despite being the only artist doing two songs, Bajracharya humbly tells us, "I was touched when I read Mahendra's poem. He was really thinking about why we need peace. Everyone is seeking peace, but usually can't articulate why."

Mahendra is also grateful to Bajracharya for choosing his poem, *Malai Shanti Chahieko Chha*. "Everyone feels the things I wrote about, but he really appreciated my feelings," says the 18-year-old who wrote the words after visiting his hometown of Charikot recently. A family member was hassled by security forces, and though they apologised for it immediately, Karki felt it has become very difficult for normal Nepalis to work or go to school and just lead normal lives.

This is the first time artists like Nirakar Yakthumba and Nalina Chitrakar (the only female performing) can recall so many artists working together for charity. Yakthumba of 1974AD, says it's been a learning experience for him: "I realised you don't have to know literature to get the message across."

Of Bijaya Poudel's poem, he adds, "You need sincerity and this boy Bijaya has that."

The rest of the artists—a truly astonishing all-star group including Karma Band, Karna Das, Sunil Baredwa and even Sur Sudha and Anil Shahi—all have similar tales of how the children's poems inspired them to devote their time to converting the words into music.

The proceeds will go to a children's park. The mayor has already allocated 11 ropanis in Sina Mangal, opposite the airport. There's talk the concert will travel to Pokhara and Dharan. "Maybe the songs will even get translated and performed by international artists," said Sangeeta Thapa, already thinking about the next phase.

But for now, the concert has got to have its strongest impact right here at home. Actor and pilot Vijay Lama, known to give his time to worthy causes, will participate in the group song at the concert and is currently involved in filming the music video for it. "It's time people who love Nepal come together and join hands against violence. The bleeding of our nation has to stop." About the group song, he adds, "This song can be a national song, not biased by politics or religion, but by Nepalis." ●

The *Shanti ko Sapana* benefit concert will be held at the BICC on 27 March at 5PM. Tickets are available at Tik n' Tok, Suwal Music and Video and all Nanglo outlets.

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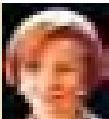
Is Spain a role model?

Two European leaders have opposing views on the fallout of the terrorist attacks in Madrid

With all due respect for the Spanish electorate and to those citizens mourning their dead, I believe that socialist leader Jose Luis Zapatero's position on withdrawing his country's troops from Iraq constitutes a victory for Al

YES

Emma Bonino



Qaeda. This was precisely the interpretation of the terrorist group itself, as was clear from the declarations of "we won!" that flooded the Internet and Arab television programs, whether correct or not.

Many in Europe had continued to believe that terrorism was almost exclusively a matter between Arabs and the US and that America was in a certain way "asking for it". But 11 March provided irrefutable proof that the Al Qaeda represents a real

There is only one real problem: what do we do now? Pack our bags? If this is the answer, it means yet again abandoning the Iraqis, letting them descend into a violent civil war with unimaginable repercussions for the region and the world.

It would be opportune if we in the West understood that we are not the only players and arbiters in the world, and that every word we pronounce is translated, heard, interpreted and repeated, hour after hour, by 220 million Arabs or Muslims.

Certain leaders of the European left have stated—involuntarily, I am sure—that they share Zapatero's position. Perhaps they haven't grasped how this announcement might be read and acted upon by the terrorists themselves. (It was not by chance that US democratic presidential candidate John Kerry immediately

from the beginning for the UN to be given a role in the Iraqi conflict and to use every diplomatic means possible to avoid resorting to military force, introducing a proposal to force Saddam Hussein into exile which in other cases (Liberia for example) proved to be a practical and reasonable solution.

In a broader context, our plan for a World Organisation of Democracy involves a reform of the United Nations intended to restore the spirit and the letter of the UN Charter.


However, in the current circumstances, we must recognise that after the divisions within the Security Council and the terrorist attacks that killed the highest UN functionaries in Baghdad, an appeal to the UN is no more than a rhetorical alibi unless accompanied by a explicit call to those countries, including in the Arab world, that still stand on the sidelines with regard to Iraq, to finally commit to assuming real and

Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, in keeping with both his campaign promises and his participation in demonstrations for peace and against the illegitimate war and illegal occupation of Iraq, has confirmed as president elect his intention to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq unless the United Nations takes over command of operations there.

His decision is logical and coherent. I agree entirely with Zapatero and believe that brute force alone cannot defeat terrorism. We must study

NO

Mario Soares



its causes and understand the reasons for its influence over desperate and humiliated populations.

The awful attacks of 11 March in Spain demonstrate that global terrorism still has significant resources and is capable of broadening its scope of action, striking a European country for the first time. Those who believed that the "war on terror", to use Bush's phrase, could be won by defeating and occupying Iraq and, later, by capturing Saddam Hussein, are at a loss to explain what just happened.

We cannot avoid asking whether the strategy conceived for the "war on terror", which gives priority to military force and ignores the conventions of international law and human rights (in Afghanistan and Iraq, for starters) was the most intelligent and appropriate. This question grows more urgent the more one takes into account the progressive deterioration of both countries and the growing tensions in Iran, Syria and Pakistan and, in a more subtle but no less worrying manner, the Islamic world in general—not to mention the progressive worsening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the unacceptable construction of the new "wall of shame" on the West



Some 11 million Spaniards, a quarter of the population, turned up to protest the Madrid bombings that killed 200 people.

threat to us all, and that it is an organisation operating on a global scale with a political agenda that, far from being secret, is publicly proclaimed, preached, and propagated.

Any who might still believe that these attacks are the work of "a few Bedouins" or who feel safer locked in their homes, are either naive or simply don't understand what is at stake.

It should suffice to consult a map of the slaughter of the last few years: New York, Bali, Istanbul, Riyad, Casablanca, Baghdad, Nassyria, Kerbala, and now Madrid—in addition to the earlier attacks in Nairobi, Dar Es Salam, etc—to grasp the dimension of the threat. A tally of the errors, real or presumed, committed in the last few months by various protagonists in this drama can hardly count as an excuse.

criticised this position.) But if we think for a moment, it isn't hard to guess what the result might be: more attacks, against governments or international and regional organisations, civilian or military facilities, Arab, American or European, selected with great tactical or "political" precision to spread terror and make us all hostages or prisoners.

This is why a campaign promise of the Spanish socialist presidential candidate, which unexpectedly was converted into a potential government policy, must not become an order to withdraw troops that could play into the hands of Al Qaeda.

We are not all Zapateros, nor should we be. Nor can we serve (or even seem to serve) Bin Laden and his political agenda.

As a radical militant I fought

substantial responsibilities in that country.

In short: in sharp contrast to Zapatero's position, the correct response to 11 March should be, "We will all go to Baghdad," with the determination to assume a concrete role in the fight against terrorism. Only in this manner can the calls for UN and/or NATO involvement have real meaning and effect, as expressions of shared responsibility.

Finally, it must be said that there is nothing noble about abandoning the Iraqis (as happened to the Chechens, the Bosnians and many others) when they need us most and at a time so crucial to their future. It is hardly a gesture that the democratic world could feel proud of. ● (IPS)

Emma Bonino is a deputy in the European Parliament and leader of the Transnational Radical Party.

Third World countries, principally in Africa, to misery, but it is also creating two-tiered societies in the developed world, where the gap between rich and poor is growing wider and wider.

Capitalism itself is changing its nature, evolving from a productive, industrial model to what is essentially a financial, speculative one—what might be called casino capitalism.

This syndrome is spreading throughout the world as unregulated globalisation leads us deeper and deeper into unforeseen disasters. Immorality and the absence of ethical values have further exacerbated the situation, as has the rampant subordination of politics to partisan interests and unjust economic criteria.

The time to react is now. A few days ago eight million Spanish citizens—a fifth of the population—demonstrated in the streets and squares of Spain against the terrorist attacks of 11 March. This act should serve as an example. All people must reject immorality in economic activities, deception in politics, indifference to the hardship of one's neighbours and insensitivity to catastrophes and pandemics like AIDS until the day they strike one or one's family.

The fact that today's world is interdependent means that we are all responsible. Therefore solidarity and social justice cannot remain mere slogans. As ever, everything depends on whether we decide to improve the troubled world in which we have to live. This is why I believe the victory of Zapatero and the Spanish Socialist Workers Party was an excellent sign. It is a victory that reinforces those who are working for peace, social justice, dialogue, human rights and international law. This is the way to fight terrorism. ● (IPS)

Mario Soares was President of Portugal from 1986-1996.

Bank. Wherever we look, the world is slipping into profound crisis—a crisis of morality and values. The clash of civilisations and religions—and within them of fanatic and extremist sects, like the Christian fundamentalists, which count George Bush among them—seems to be setting the stage for an extremely dangerous future. "Predatory globalisation"—to borrow a term from the book with that title by Princeton University professor Richard Falk—is reducing

Asia's two polls

Malaysia shuns radicalism

In what is probably the biggest upset in Malaysian electoral history, the Islamic opposition party and its sole ally, the National Justice Party of jailed former deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim, have lost nearly everything they had won in the 1999 election.

At the time, they benefited from massive backlash against former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was perceived to have had Anwar arrested in 1998 because he posed a challenge to him. But in the 21 March polls, voters routed the state governments led by the Islamic party Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) in the Muslim majority strongholds of Kelantan and Terengganu. PAS managed to win only six of the 86 parliamentary constituencies it contested. The National Justice Party lost nearly all the 48 seats it contested. However, its president, Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, Anwar Ibrahim's wife, won her Permatang Pauh seat by 590 votes on a recount.

Political pundits are arguing the causes for such a big rout. What happened and why?

"The verdict is a resounding endorsement of Abdullah, moderate and progressive Islam," says social scientist Chandra Muzaffar.

"Malaysians—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—have made an unambiguous decision rejecting PAS-style radicalism in the name of Islam."

Analysts said the losses PAS suffered on Sunday showed that its 1999 gain was entirely because of protest votes against the Mahathir government over its treatment of Anwar Ibrahim. "The Dr Mahathir's retirement and Abdullah's pleasant personality took the spite out of the Malay anger," said an academic, who declined to be named. Muslims also, generally rejected Islamic radicalism of the type advocated by PAS."

Abdullah took over from Mahathir in October and immediately wooed Malays by distancing himself from the veteran, cancelling some wasteful megaprojects and pledging to clean up the civil service, restructure the police force and put an end to official corruption. His focus on agriculture, rural development and public health were popular. In the wake of the vote, some fear that the massive loss would radicalise PAS. However, PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang himself vowed to stick to the constitutional way.

(Baradan Kuppusamy in Kuala Lumpur/IPS)



Taiwan turmoil

Uncertainty and divisions loom in the days and weeks ahead in Taiwan, after mass demonstrations, fuelled by folktale-like speculations about the rigging of the 20 March presidential elections, turned into violent riots. Supporters of the defeated Kuomintang party clashed with police and opponents from the winning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), whose candidate, incumbent President Chen Shui-bian, won 50.12 percent of the vote—just 0.2 percent more than his challenger, Lien Chan.

Taiwan's High Court ordered all 13,000 ballot boxes be sealed after Lien Chan, leader of the Nationalist party or Kuomintang, demanded a recount. While formal legal proceedings in Lien's election challenge are set to begin within a week, his supporters have already been taking to the streets to demand an immediate recount.

A crowd of 10,000 supporters of Lien Chan braved the rain on Sunday, staging a 10-hour protest in front of the presidential office in Taipei. Demonstrators were chanting "invalid" while waving the flags of the opposition alliance. A girl in her twenties had her belly exposed and the Chinese character for 'Liar' written on it. The attack was addressed at President Chen, whom the opposition has accused of playing up an assassination attempt on 19 March, just before the elections, or even staging it himself. Chen was slightly wounded in the stomach by a bullet as he rode through the streets in southern Taiwan on the day before the Saturday elections.

In other cities across the island, protests took a violent turn as KMT supporters rioted, clashing with DPP's followers. Police forces were dispatched to install calm. Faced with mounting pressure from the public to prove that the 19 March attack on incumbent President Chen Shui-bian was not "faked", the presidential office took the unusual step of showing close-up photos of Chen lying unconscious on the operating table and of him recuperating in the hospital. Yet many remained unconvinced of their authenticity.

Some of Taiwan's political commentators are also accusing Chen of being scared to face up to the challenge mounted by the opposition. "If DPP's actions during these elections have been all fair and just, why doesn't Chen come out and say: 'We will begin to recount the votes now'," argues Professor Chang Lin-wei from Taiwan University.

(Antoaneta Bezlova in Taipei/IPS)



Meenaxi

The best of everything makes this movie an extravaganza of colour, music, dance and talent

RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

Celebrated painter MF Husain's latest cinematic venture, *Meenaxi—Tale of Three Cities*, might as well have been a 'tale of talents', because of the way it converges Indian artistic talent at its inspired best.

The title of the two-hour feature film derives from the fact that it was shot in the Indian cities of Hyderabad and Jaisalmer and in the capital of the Czech Republic, Prague. These historic, culturally rich cities form the backdrop for *Meenaxi* (with the actress Tabu in the title role), a woman in search of perfect love. However, *Meenaxi*'s is not the only quest. The story—"Meenaxi" means the fish-eyed Hindu goddess—weaves around the search of Urdu writer Nawab, played by Raghubir Yadav, for his lost muse and his rediscovery of self.

This unfolds following his chance meeting with the lithe and lissome Meenaxi, a perfume seller, at a *qawwali* (devotional Sufi singing which blended Hindu and Islamic mysticism) in the central Indian city of Hyderabad. *Meenaxi* proves to be something of a wayward muse, but she goads and torments Nawab into states of passion that perhaps is the real muse of all art. Ask Husain and he will tell you that "the only true gift a human being can have is passion".

Tabu and Yadav have formidable reputations not only as highly rated actors in Bollywood, but also for their ability to get under the skin of the difficult, complex characters. The male lead role, that of a raffish motor mechanic, is played by Kunal Kapoor, a male model selected for his compelling classic features.

MF Husain, 88 and his son Owais Husain, 36 have thrown together the music of AR Rahman, the camerawork of Santosh Sivan and the singing voices of Asha Bhonsle and Alka Yagnik and the Lebanese Dalinda to create their extravaganza of colour, song and dance. Prague, one of Husain's

favourite cities, adds an international touch as does the choreography supervised by the Italian National Award winner Illiana Czhtaristi.

"I wanted the best," MF Husain says with the same uncompromising attitude that is the hallmark of his paintings that adorn the homes of collectors around the world. Not long ago, a Husain painting *Sitar Player* fetched \$50,000 at a Christie's auction in Hong Kong. Those who are tempted to view *Meenaxi*, the film, as another painting may be forgiven because Husain sees celluloid in much the same way as he would canvas.

This is why while making *Meenaxi*, serious differences of opinion arose between him and Owais, who is also a painter but more serious about making a transition into the multi-dimensional world of filmmaking.

"There were times when the differences were so serious that we thought the film would not come off," said Owais. But perseverance paid off and each time he was able to bring his father around. Husain is as famous for his moods as his masterpieces.

MF Husain easily and generously gives credit for the film to Owais but the master's touch is apparent from the word 'go'. Indeed, Husain rewrote the track, based on his studies of the art of the Sufi mystics and even the title *Meenaxi* was his suggestion.

Owais is equally modest, saying that he was blessed by the sheer talent of actors of the calibre of Tabu whose acrobatic swaying to the opening solo number *Yeh Rishta* (this relationship) which features Dalinda, sets the pace for the whirlwind of emotions and feelings that follows.

Tabu, in turn, ascribes her dervish-like performance to AR Rahman's music. "It is the music. It is almost divine." There is nothing incidental about the dervish bit. "Rahman and I went to Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi's birthplace in Anatolia to listen to the dervishes

when we were researching the scores," said Owais.

Leading Bollywood film critic Khalid Mohammed commented after a preview: "Marvellously European in its candidness and utterly rooted in the Indian soil in its surging spirit and high drama, *Meenaxi* from its first shot to the last, moves with a puckish spirit, almost as if its makers were escorting the viewer through a fairground carnival."

Ever the iconoclast, Husain—who still walks barefoot in salutation of the days when he began his career hand-painting billboards for Bollywood films—departs so far from the conventional in *Meenaxi* that even the storyline is barely discernible.

Instead, *Meenaxi* appears as *avatars* (incarnations) in the effete, jaded mind of Nawab—first as the Hyderbadi purveyor of perfumes, then as a comely activist for water conservation in the deserts of crenellated Jaisalmer and finally as the waitress Maria in a waterfront café in Prague who aspires to be an actress.

"There is a chronological sequence unlike in *Gajagami*," explains Owais. *Gajagami*, (woman with the sensuous gait of an elephant), released four years ago, was Husain's vision of Indian womanhood as represented by his own muse, the former Bollywood screen goddess Madhuri Dixit.

What weaves the narration together is the versatility of Tabu in her role as the demanding critic Meenaxi, who provokes Nawab into renewed attempts at writing only to dismiss each essay as hackneyed and perhaps not worth the candle.

If nothing else, Husain succeeds, with *Meenaxi*, in exploring the fathomless world of creativity and the torturous relationship between the artist, his art and his muse. All this in a completely novel and yet universal way. ● (IPS)

American power in an election year

Global power, and America's share of it, is like a three-dimensional chess game

America's presidential election campaign is heating up, and with it, the debate about American power. A year ago, after the blitz victory in the four-week Iraq War, many people thought the issue was settled. But difficulties in Iraq and in America's other foreign relations have placed the topic at the heart of the campaign.

A little over a decade ago, conventional wisdom worldwide held that America was in decline. In 1992, the winner of the New Hampshire primary election argued that

COMMENT
Joseph S Nye



"the Cold War is over—

and Japan won." When I published *Bound to Lead* in 1990, I predicted the continuing rise of American power. But today, I regard it as equally important to challenge the new conventional wisdom that America is invincible and that the "new unilateralism" should guide US foreign policy.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some analysts described the resulting world as unipolar and saw few constraints on American power. This is misleading. Power in a global information age is distributed among countries in a pattern that resembles a complex three-dimensional chess game.

On the top chessboard, military power is largely unipolar. The US is the only country with state of the art air, naval and ground forces capable of global deployment—thus, the quick victory in Iraq last year. But on the middle chessboard, economic power is

multi-polar, with the US, Europe, Japan and China representing two-thirds of world production. On this economic board, other countries often balance American power. The bottom chessboard is the realm of transnational relations that cross borders beyond government control. This realm includes everyone from bankers who electronically transfer huge sums, to terrorists transferring weapons or hackers disrupting Internet operations.

On this bottom board, power is widely dispersed and it makes no sense to speak of unipolarity, multipolarity or hegemony. Those who recommend a unilateral American foreign policy based on such traditional descriptions of American power are relying on a woefully inadequate analysis.

Many of the real challenges to American power are coming not on the upper military board but on the lower transnational board. Ironically, the temptation to go it alone may ultimately weaken the US in this domain.

Why is this true? Today's information revolution and the type of globalisation that accompanies it are transforming and shrinking the world. At the beginning of the 21st century, these two forces increased American power, particularly the ability to influence others through attractive, or what I call "soft" power. But with time, technological gains will spread to other countries and people.

For example, today America's 5 percent of the global population represents more



than half of all Internet users. But in a decade or two, Chinese may become the language of the largest number of Internet users. It will not dethrone English as a lingua franca, but at some point, the Asian market will loom larger than the American market.

Even more important, the information revolution is creating virtual communities and networks that cut across national borders, and transnational corporations and non-governmental actors—terrorists included—will play larger roles. Many organisations will have soft power of their own as they attract citizens into coalitions that cut across national boundaries.

The terrorist attacks on New York, Washington and now Madrid are terrible symptoms of the deep changes already occurring. Technology has been diffusing power away from governments and empowering individuals and groups to play roles in world politics—including wreaking massive destruction—that were once reserved to governments. Privatisation has been the leitmotif in economic policy in recent years, but in politics the privatisation of war is terrorism.

Moreover, as globalisation shrinks distance, events in faraway places—like Afghanistan—have a greater impact on everyone's lives. The world has moved

from the Cold War to the Global Information Age, but the dominant foreign policy paradigms have not kept pace.

Today's growing global networks of interdependence are putting new items on national and international agendas and Americans simply cannot solve many of these by themselves. International financial stability is vital to prosperity, but the US needs the cooperation of others to ensure it.

In a world where borders are becoming more porous than ever to everything from drugs to infectious diseases to terrorism, Americans will be forced to work with other countries beyond their borders.

Because of its leading edge in the information revolution and its vast investment in traditional power resources, the US will remain the world's single most powerful country well into this new century. While potential coalitions to check American power may be created, it is unlikely that they will become firm alliances unless the US handles its hard coercive power in an overbearing unilateral manner that undermines its "soft" or attractive power. ● (Project Syndicate)

Joseph Nye, Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and a former US Assistant Secretary of Defense, is author of the forthcoming book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.

Military spending outdated and ineffective

By cutting military spending, the US could boost overall security



JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON

Over one-fifth of the proposed 2005 US military budget could be cut and the money spent on projects that would better protect the nation's security, according to a report from nine national-security experts.

Since the 11 September attacks, overall US security is not strengthened, despite steep increases in US defence under

President George W Bush. The report charges that some of the most expensive items in the budget have little to do with the threats the United States faces today, and calls for a much more integrated approach to determining defence priorities that would include non-military priorities such as economic assistance and peacekeeping, as well as strictly military programs.

The report, 'A Unified Security Budget for the United States', concludes some \$51 billion of the proposed \$230 billion 2005 budget could be reallocated and saved to use on non-military initiatives to substantially boost overall security.

"Cutting the Comanche (helicopter) program was a good start," said Marcus Corbin, a senior analyst at the Centre for Defence Information (CDI). "But our report identifies 10 other programs that could be safely cut to free up resources for other neglected security priorities, such as diplomatic operations, weapons of mass destruction non-proliferation and port container inspection."

The 23-page report comes amid growing public concern over the build up of unprecedented fiscal deficits and the rapidly rising defence budget. From 2000 to 2004, the Pentagon's budget ballooned by more than 50 percent, and is now comparable to that of the world's next 25 biggest military spenders combined, according to the Centre for Arms Control and Proliferation (CACAP).

Moreover, its current proposal for 2005 does not include expenditures for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the Pentagon is spending nearly \$70 billion this year alone.

With Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's warning that future social security benefits might have to be cut, many lawmakers, including Republicans, are insisting that no program should be immune from reductions.

In that light, the task force called for a major reassessment of other expensive weapons systems with questionable usefulness. It says the nature of today's threats should permit the Pentagon to reduce investment in the next generation of conventional weapons, such as fighters, helicopters, submarines and tanks, where

Washington already enjoys a substantial technological edge over any conceivable adversary.

In addition, the report calls for stopping deployment of the national missile defence (NMD) system until the technology is proven. "So far, despite spending \$75 billion, we have not found any that works, and we cannot plan our security around doing so," it says, noting that NMD is the single biggest item in the 2005 defence budget.

The report also calls for reducing the nuclear arsenal, closing unnecessary military bases and overhauling the Pentagon's financial management. Doing this could save as much as \$56 billion in 2005 alone, freeing up funds for other priorities like buying improved flak jackets and body armour, or realigning US forces to better prepare them for likely missions, like counter-terrorism, peacekeeping and stability and reconstruction operations, which are particularly relevant to US efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Such efforts could cost around \$5 billion annually.

The report specifically calls for reallocating some \$6 billion to key non-military programs, including diplomacy, international communication and non-proliferation projects, like the Nunn-Lugar initiative to fund disarmament in Russia and to find weapons and nuclear scientists alternative employment.

Also, the administration and Congress should consider sharply increasing development assistance for poor nations by up to 10 billion dollars a year to address the hopelessness and despair that can breed terrorism over time.

Finally, the report calls for increases in homeland security funding, allocating more money for emergency first-responders, including local police and fire departments and port security.

"Currently we are wasting large sums on the wrong forces for the wrong occasions," the report concluded. "It is a mistake to believe that increasing the Pentagon budget alone will guarantee our safety." ● (IPS)

“I am not corrupt”

Khum Bahadur Khadka in *Deshantar*, 21 March

I have not earned money at the expense of national interest. Nor have I made money through project commissions. I am a god-fearing man and I swear to god I am innocent. But you must understand that all leaders somehow receive money for elections. Which leader does not manage funds that way? If they don't take money, how will they fight elections? I admit that I have received funds for elections. I have taken money from my friends. Can any leader, including Madhab Kumar Nepal and others of the UML and NC, claim that they fought elections spending their own money? Can they say that the money they gave to their workers was actually their own? One must speak the truth. People say Khum Bahadur Khadka earned billions of rupees through irregularities and corruption when he was home minister. If Khum Bahadur or Govinda Raj can be corrupt then Ram Chandra Poudel, KP Oli and Bamdev Gautam are also the same. Since I am a determined person, I don't care what others think about me. I would not like to speak much about the corruption charge against me because the case is still under consideration in the court. Only my enemies clapped when I was detained by the CIAA. But people must understand that I was framed. If the corruption charges against me was just because of my house, many people in Kathmandu have houses like mine.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

I have a strong footing. I have a history in Dang. I was all set to resign from my position in the Nepali Congress (Democratic) when I was still in CIAA custody. But, Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta had warned that our resignation could worry our workers. He suggested that we should resign only after we were released by the commission. I was convinced and after my release, I met Deuba and told him that I was sick and needed a break. I also suggested that the central committee of the party had to be reorganised. I left for India. But, when I came back I found that our central committee had been converted into zonal coordinator. I had serious reservations about it because the move had reduced my role and position. I requested Deuba for reconsideration but he did not seem interested. So, I resigned from the position of general secretary and decided to rejoin Nepali Congress. Deuba has always complained that Koirala did injustice to him. But, now when Deuba himself is the boss, he has been repeating the same mistakes Koirala made. Perhaps he had learnt them from him. Deuba may have contributed to the restoration of democracy. But now that democracy needs to be brought back on track, I don't think Deuba can shoulder that responsibility. I have always been a close associate of Girija Prasad Koirala, I was with him after the restoration of multiparty democracy. In due course of time, we developed some differences and I chose to go my own way. But I never deserted him. It was he who abandoned me. After Koirala resigned from the position of prime minister, I had to make a choice between Sushil Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba as candidate for the parliamentary party leader. I went for Deuba. Now I am back to the Girija camp because I believe that Nepal's democracy is in peril due to Deuba. My differences with Koirala are about policy matters.

Just loot

Kantipur, 21 March

Maoist atrocities against innocent civilians are on the rise. Incidents of extortion, looting and physical torture prove that the Maoists have no respect for human rights of ordinary citizens, say human rights activists. Recently, in Chhaimeli Bhanjyang, 20km south of Kathmandu, they looted Rs 1.5 million worth of property and cash after severely beating up three female members of a local household. Bhim Prasad Acharya's mother had just died and he was at Pashupatinath Aryaghat with his father, Tara Prasad Acharya, when the incident occurred. When they came back home, they found the Maoists had not only looted their shop, mill and all their savings but had also left a note saying that they had taken over the house and that the Acharyas should no longer live in their own house. A red Maoist flag can be seen on top of the house. "They showed a bomb and threatened to kill us if we didn't pay the money as they demanded," says Bhim's wife, Durga. "We told them to take everything in the house and we requested them not to beat us. But they wouldn't stop," adds Laxmi, Bhim's second wife. The group of Maoists included young women as well as students in uniform.

Dying for a son

Rajdhani, 21 March

Parbat—Kaushalya Pariyar has seven small daughters and four of them are physically disabled. In a bid to preserve her marriage, she has been promising her husband to finally deliver a son. But each year since she got married when she was just 16, Pariyar has only borne daughters. Looking weak

and malnourished, Pariyar is so determined to bear a son that she no longer cares for her own health. Her husband, Bal Bahadur, has threatened to bring a second wife if she doesn't live up to her promise. "I have to give him a son anyhow," says Pariyar. "My daughters will be homeless once he remarries." With no sympathy for his wife's health condition, Bal Bahadur is firm. He lacks any love or sympathy for his own daughters, so much so that he even refused to take them to a local clinic for polio drops. Consequently, four of them are already disabled and his wife has to spend 24 hours looking after them as well as work as a wage labourer. Unfortunately, there are no health workers to educate them about nutrition and other health matters. There is also a lack of social workers to counsel them about gender equality.

Justice delivered

Annapurna Post, 21 March

Following a court ruling, two daughters of Bir Chand Ajad of Banke district will now get their shares of paternal property. 21 and 19-year-old Sanjaya and Shanti Ajad filed a case in the district court demanding their shares of paternal property last year. They moved the court, complaining that their father was not supporting them for even their food and education. The two sisters have been living separately with their mother since they were evicted from their father's house 18 years ago. They were forced to leave because their father had expected a son from his wife. Bir Chand had married another lady after his first wife went away. "We are happy that we have received justice even after a long period of 18 years," Sanjaya said in a triumphant

mood. "Better late than never." **Bank row** *Space Time*, 22 March Differences have cropped up between Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) and the foreign management of Nepal Bank Limited (NBL). The central bank is of the opinion that the foreign management has been able to perform in line with the reform objectives in the oldest bank of the country. But the NBL foreign management—ICC Group of Scotland—has blamed the government of not cooperating for the reforms. NBL Chief Executive Officer Craig McAllister complained that the government reform programs were not moving because the government had not yet formed the promised asset management company. "The judiciary has also not cooperated with our reform process." But the NRB has blamed the foreign management of not making any progress compared to the reform plans. "We had awarded the management contract with certain objectives. But, the progress is not satisfactory," said central bank governor, Tilak Rawal. Under the financial sector reform program of the government, the management of the NBL was handed over to the ICC group for a two-year contract. Without extension, the foreign management now has only five months left. When the NRB and NLB signed an agreement almost two years ago, the condition was that the government would have to establish an asset management company and the foreign management would have to bring the 60 percent non-performing asset of the bank down to 10 percent. With time running out,

फरक हुट्याउजोस्!

Find the difference

Surya Bahadur Thapa : We will hold elections. We will, we will!

Girija Koirala and Madhab Nepal : We will have a decisive movement. We will, we will!

Citizens : They all look the same.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We will treat the abducted 36 government personnel in accordance to the Geneva Convention,”

Maoist leader, Nanda Kisor Pun alias Pasang in *BBC Nepali Service*, 23 March

Rajdhani, 21 March

“I beheaded him with my khukuri”



The British finally captured Mogaung in Burma after fierce fighting in May and June 1944. The Gurkha and African brigades suffered heavy casualties. Tul Bahadur Pun of the 3rd/6th Gurkha Rifles was awarded the Victoria Cross for extraordinary bravery in attacking Japanese positions single-handedly and killing scores of Japanese soldiers, including some he beheaded with his khukuri. In this continuation of his memories from last week, he describes his platoon's attempt to capture the town. This serialisation of the testimonies of retired Gurkha soldiers is translated from *Lahurey ka Katha* by Dev Bahadur Thapa and published by Himal Books.

As we planned our attack, I stressed that it should take place between 1 and 2AM, since that is the time the enemies would be asleep. However, the officer in command seemed reluctant, since attacking in the dead of the night would not be easy. However, I insisted that for this very reason, the timing was ideal. I stressed that there were chances the enemy sentries may be asleep at this time, making it better for attack. The officer nodded his assent.

We made a scheme to be on our guard by 1AM and to attack by 2AM no matter what. Two companies were assigned for the task. The first would enter the bridge at the front. As soon as we started firing, the second company would begin making noise, creating the impression that a large contingent was on the assault. Our company was to lead.

They pushed me to the front, saying I had already made reconnaissance of the situation. I was a rifleman at the time, and was accompanied by another man of the same rank, a section commander and a company officer captain. We were to make the first assault and the rest were to jump off if anything of consequence took place. A full company was kept in the rear to making diversionary noise.

The enemy had no idea of our plans. We were to take two

different courses, with the commanding officer remaining in the middle. We had to throw grenades on his instructions. We had them ready and when the signal came we instantly threw them at the enemy bunkers. The enemies stuck the barrels of their guns out of their bunkers. The bombs started exploding and we threw more, one after another. Those inside the bunker started shouting. It seemed that was their end. At the opportune moment our company started pouring onto the bridge. Our troops got mixed up with theirs. Some fired bullets and some hit the enemies with the butt of the rifles. The hand-to-hand combat ended with the elimination of all the enemy.

At dawn we saw that most of them were killed and those who survived had managed to escape. We had the bridge under control and our troops went out to capture the town. We fixed our camp near the town in open fields, with no place to hide and some of us were killed because of this. There were, however, a number of mango trees. One could hide behind one of these trees.

On two nights we made false attacks. We fired away and pretended it was the real thing to deceive the enemy. On the third night we actually marched in, but made the mistake of taking positions directly in the line of enemy cannon fire. Almost all of

our infantry was wiped out. Since there was nowhere to take shelter, many were killed.

We were pinned down in the open fields. I was leading my platoon and was in the extreme right corner and the section commander was in the middle. Everyone else was killed, I escaped because I was on the edge. The platoon sergeant hid behind a mango trunk and escaped. He called and asked me to leave my weapon, take a gun and charge. I looked to the right and left and found no trace of anyone, they had all been killed. I was the lone survivor and it was clear I would also be killed.

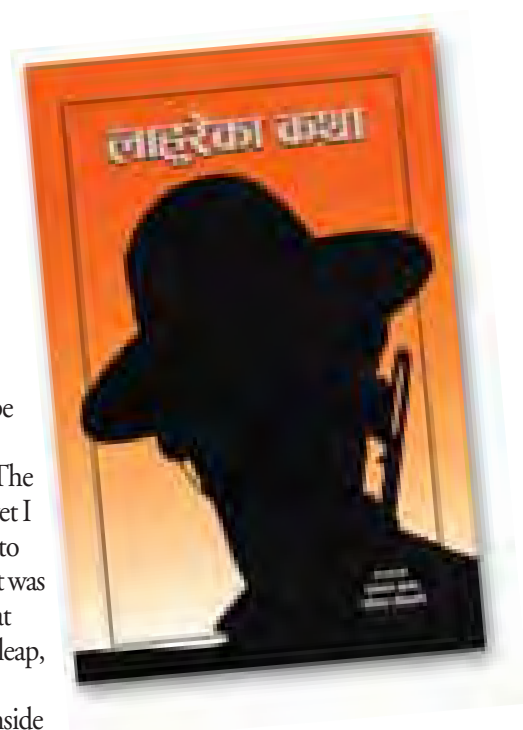
I raised my head, and the enemy spotted me. I jumped forward twice to reach where the section commander's gun was lying. I picked it up and jumped into the midst of the enemy, firing at all sides until they were all killed. A little distance away there was a bunker and a circular sentry post. Four enemy soldiers were in the process of loading their guns. When I jumped in among them, they were surprised and couldn't figure out what to do. I pulled the trigger, but had run out of ammo. They were advancing when I threw a grenade into the trench and killed them all off.

There were artillery pieces and machine guns all around. Suddenly the British officer who was with us when we captured the bridge appeared. He had been hit by a bullet and was imploring me

to take him away. He instructed me to retreat by crawling. I managed to hide myself, and in this position I was unhurt when the enemies started firing with machine guns. Not one of our troops raised their heads as the battleground was so flat that nothing could escape the enemy's notice.

I was in a dilemma. The bullets were very close, yet I didn't know how to get to them. A British regiment was fighting close by, firing at the enemy posts. In one leap, I got to the ammunition boxes and threw them inside the bunker. Since they contained cartridges on a belt, I wrapped the belt around my body, then starting loading the bullets. Each stripe could take 30 bullets. First I tried to throw hand grenades at the enemy, but they kept bouncing back and exploding behind me, no matter how hard I threw them. I kept reloading and firing. There was uninterrupted firing from the other side, which destroyed part of my hideout. After five or six attempts, I hit the enemy and the firing from his side stopped.

I raised my head and saw him lying flat on the ground. I went to the edge of the bunker to take his gun, but found there was a wire mesh in front of him to protect him from grenades. That



is why all my grenades were bouncing back. I took out my khukuri and cut through the mesh. As I was snatching the gun off the fallen man, two enemy soldiers came up from behind and tried to capture me. I had left my weapon outside, and all I had at my disposal was the khukuri. I beheaded one of them and hit the second one on his shoulder and I had to cut him several times before he also died. Suddenly, a third enemy appeared, but I cut him with my khukuri too. Others from the trench followed, but I kept slashing them with my khukuri. When there were too many of them, I took out another grenade and threw it at them. There was some rustling, and then it was all quiet.

BIGBEN



Death poems

Dongol turns Manjul's words into art

Promising artist Asha Dangol's work at his second solo exhibition 'Inside the Words' at the Moksh Art Gallery in Jhamsikhel is more than just paintings. Impressionist Dangol has transferred the words of popular poet Manjul's 'Death Poem' series onto his canvasses, a collision that proves to be filled with visual delights for viewers.

Dangol's work is illustrative, with bold line drawings dominating the canvasses and depicting local

scenarios and characters. His work is remarkably simple, and although the paintings lean toward the abstract, they are easy to grasp. In the thirty paintings done over three months, Dangol seems to have captured the eccentricity, momentum and themes of Manjul's poems perfectly.

Manjul's poems have already proved their worth since their first publication five years ago. Now its time for Asha Dangol to prove himself as well. "I was looking for some sort of exploration in painting, and I found Manjul at bay," says Dangol. While Manjul's poems may sound pessimistic with the whole collection titled "Death Poem", they infact sing a song of life. "His word games and compositions are really moving," explains Dangol.

(Maheswor Acharya)

Inside the Words paintings by Asha Dangol
Moksh Art Gallery till 5 April
5528703

Advance tips

Hit it further, not harder and add a few more yards in your drives and other shots

Once a golfer has reached a reasonable level in his game, it is inevitable that the lure of hitting the ball a little further begins to beckon.

Though the maxims of “it’s not how you drive, but how you arrive”, and the better known “drive for show, putt for dough” are well known, there are good reasons to hit the ball further. Youngsters who can hit the ball further are almost always given preference in golf

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



training academies over those who are shorter and steadier. Why? Because, to make those low scores needed today, you need to be able

to reach the par 5s in two shots, and hit short irons into par fours.

A few months back, a senior diplomat and avid golfer said to me: “Deepak, these people spend over \$500 for a new club that hits the ball 10 yards longer. I wonder, if they spent a quarter of that amount taking golf lessons, they would probably be better off.” I totally agree with him, but I wonder if other golfers realise this.

It is true that with new technology, equipment has revolutionised the game, but there is sometimes a culture of buying fancy new equipment to almost make a fashion statement, showing off a little within the golfing community. Fortunately this is not as common in Nepal as it is elsewhere.

So how can you hit the ball a little further?

Though ‘power’ makes the ball travel further, once the dynamics are understood, it becomes quite obvious what exactly creates more distance. It is the speed the clubhead is traveling when it hits the ball and this is a result of the downswing swing speed. Very simply, the faster the clubhead travels towards the target as it makes contact with the ball, the further the ball flies.

My tips here today are geared towards increasing the clubhead speed. Yet, one should know their limits, as everyone does not have perfect timing and is not as flexible nor as strong as Mr Tiger Woods.

Average club golfers usually gets too tense when standing before the ball, specially when they have their driver in their hands. They often think a quick and longer backswing will achieve more distance. This excessively fast and long movement actually leads to a breakdown of their swing, and thus the power they are trying to achieve.

One should not over try. The human body when coiled up for a golf shot is similar to an elastic band. If stretched, it adds power, but stretched beyond the optimum point, the band warps or breaks.

One major key to swing power is suppleness. The more ‘elasticated’ you are, the more speed you will generate on the downswing. For this you must be relaxed. If you are tense over the ball, your muscles become rigid and inflexible. You need to be stretchable and full of energy.

There is a simple breathing technique that you can consider incorporating into your pre-shot routine, which will relax you and help you to generate more swing speed through the impact.

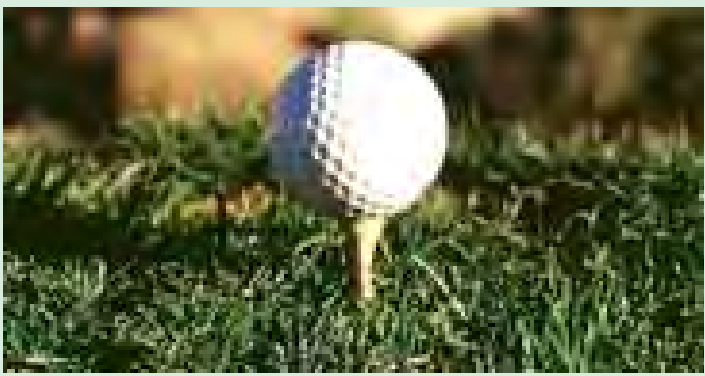
Standing upright, breathe in deep and hold your breath for a few seconds. Then put your hands on your sternum and press inwards while breathing out, using the pressure of your hand to force the air out of the lower part of your lungs. Repeat this a few times (preferably stopping before you hyperventilate). This will help you relax before you move on to your set up and will help you hit the ball closer to your full potential.

During your actual swing, you need to build up the energy needed for the downswing. A major key is not over swinging on the backswing. Swing back only as far as you can turn your shoulders, and only then release your downswing and have the confidence to take a full follow through.

Keeping the backswing within the limits of your body’s flexibility conserves the valuable energy needed to generate more swing speed through impact.

Try this out and let me know if it helps.

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



MANISHA ARYAL

Dhaka to Kathmandu (and back)

Volkswagen Beetles from Bangladesh negotiate Nepali highways in style

KANAK MANI DIXIT

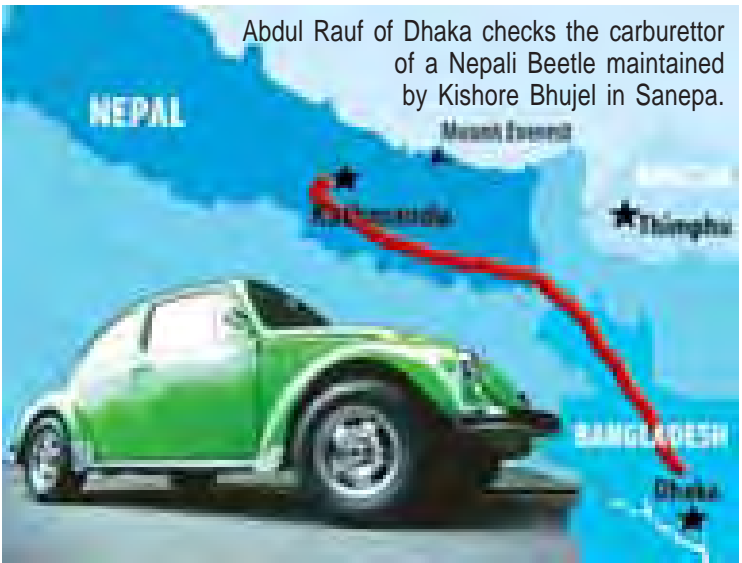
Four Volkswagen Beetles left Dhaka at dawn on 19 March, headed for Kathmandu. It was smooth sailing all the way, past the India-Bangladesh border at Chyangrabanda, the night stop in Siliguri and right up to Kakarbhitta. But then, the first stoppage because the Nepali immigrations/customs officers did not know of the ‘Carnet passage’ papers that allow transborder travel for vehicles.

“There are military checkpoints everywhere, which we did not even see in India’s heavily militarised Siliguri region or in North Bangladesh,” says Zahid Moin. He hastens to add, “But the army men were all very pleasant and always waved us through.”

What struck Murtaza Sibgatul Haq most was to see women active in the many towns along the Nepal tarai and in Kathmandu. “We did not see women walking around so freely either in Bangladesh or India.” Adds Murtaza, “Also, we saw lots of cows and Nepali dogs were very tireless in chasing our Bangla Beetles.”

Sujon Didarul Islam, to a chorus of agreement, described the climb up from Bhainse to Sim Bhanjyang past Aghor on the Thribhuban Rajpath as the most harrowing part of the journey for the flatlanders. “We just did not dare look down the side, particularly in the stretch past Tistung,” recalls Ahmed Raju Kabir. “We were stunned to see lorry drivers careening around at such speed.”

The unannounced leader of the team is Zubeir Moin, the tall and soft-spoken manager at Siemens Bangladesh Limited. He said, “The road was smooth all the way from Dhaka, except for the last 100km



Abdul Rauf of Dhaka checks the carburettor of a Nepali Beetle maintained by Kishore Bhujel in Sanepa.

in Kathmandu. It is an easy two-and-a-half day trip. We hope more people will travel this route, especially after the Nepali officials get to know the Carnet paperwork and the bad stretch in Nepal is repaired.”

“Surprisingly,” said Murtaza to general agreement, “Our engines ran better on gasoline that we took on in Nepal.” Hmm. The Beetles’ air-cooled engines fared very well in their life-time test on the Sim Bhanjyang climb and also the last stretch up from Naubise to Nagdhunga. “Our engines remained ice-cool,” says Sujon Didarul Islam. The credit for the fine performance of the Bangla engines, says Zubeir Moin, goes to the technical skills of Abdul Rauf, the genial 52-year-old who is one of the few remaining professional mechanics in southasia trained by Volkswagen itself.

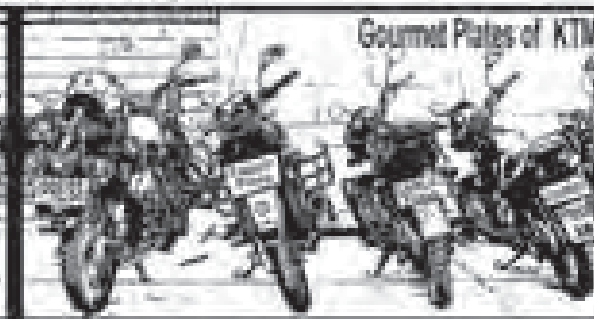


Rauf Bhai is also traveling with the team and he is asked what he thinks of the condition of the Nepali VW Beetles they have met in Kathmandu. With a friend translating his Bangla, he replies, “The cars in general are looking very good from the outside, paint is good and the interiors are cleaner than our Beetles. But denting work

here is not good. However, engine synchronisation is the main problem in the machines I have seen. As a result, the vehicles sound unhealthy and cannot give enough power.”

Rauf Bhai, it seems, can diagnose the health of Beetles by simply cocking an ear and casting a careful eye over the chassis-and-body of the sick machine. And he was concerned about the Nepali Beetles. Perhaps he would be willing to come for a longish stretch at the cost of the Kathmandu Beetle Owner’s Club, to train Nepali mechanics and pass on the skills that he possesses as the vehicles get older and more in need of attention.

But there is no chance this time around, other than for a cursory look at the Nepali Beetles. For the Bangla Beetles have miles to go before they sleep. First, the climb up to Nagarkot, then appointments with the Bangladesh ambassador Humayun Kabir and the Nepal Tourism Board, before dashing off to Pokhara and finally down the the way they came: to Narayanghat, Kakarbhitta, Siliguri, Chyangrabandha, Bogura, Bangabandhu Setu and, finally, Dhaka. ●

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, a man with a goatee is a hero.)



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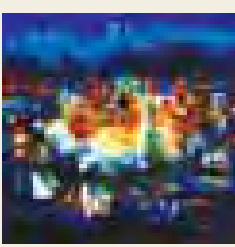
To see all the Adventures of Herojig - White Man in Nepal, go to www.extreme-nepal.com

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Paintings by Asha Dangol** until 4 April 12:30-7:30 PM at Gallery Moksh. Closed Mondays
- ❖ **Glimpses of Kathmandu City** Paintings by Uma Shanker Shah, 26 March to 12 April at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Numafung paintings** until 30 March at Gallery Nine. 4428694
- ❖ **Samadhi** Paintings of Sri Lanka by Prakash Chandwadkar, 24 March to 26 April at the Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. 4428549



EVENTS

- ❖ **Lars Von Trier's Dogville** screened by the Film Club, 5PM on 28 March at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Tickets Rs 50. 5542544
- ❖ **Three Kings** 6:30 PM on 25 March at Moksh Club, Pulchowk. 5528703
- ❖ **Kathak Nritya** at the Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5:30 PM on 26 March.
- ❖ **Meditation Camp** at Osho Tapoban, Nagarjun. 3 April to 9 April, 4353762
- ❖ **Stand-up comedy** by Oohi Ashu, followed by music at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. 6PM on 1 April, entry Rs 100

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazzmandu Supper Club** 26 March, 7:30-11PM at the Hyatt Regency. Tickets Rs 2,999
- ❖ **Jazzmandu All Star Fever** 27 March, 6PM onwards. Tickets Rs 699
- ❖ **Raagmani** Guitar and compositions by Anil Shahi. 5PM onwards on 24 March at Hotel Del' Annapurna. 4258418
- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** with Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band every Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's every Friday from 7PM onwards. 4479488

FOOD

- ❖ **Margarita Night** on 26 March at Dwarika's. Rs 650 per person, 4479488
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** BBQ lunch with live music at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, every Saturday and Sunday. Rs 650 per person. 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 and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **Free Irish Coffee** with every main course. K-too! Beer & Steakhouse. 4433043

GETAWAYS


- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage** Dadagaon luxury package of gourmet meals, board and transport. Highland Travel & Tours, 4253352, 4253053
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** at the edge of Shivapuri. Email: info@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Weekend Special** for Rs 3,000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280

BOOKWORM

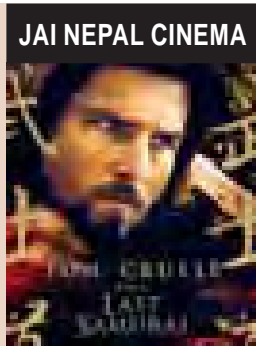
Maoists in the Land of Buddha Prakash A Raj
Nirala Publications, 2004
Rs 632

Prakash Raj presents an account of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, with references to the changing image of our country—from the birthplace of Buddha to a nation of chaos.

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



The Last Samurai is set in Japan, where Civil War veteran Captain Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) trains the Emperor's troops to use modern weapons as they prepare to defeat the last of the country's samurais. But Algren's passion is swayed when he is captured by the samurai and learns about their traditions and code of honour.



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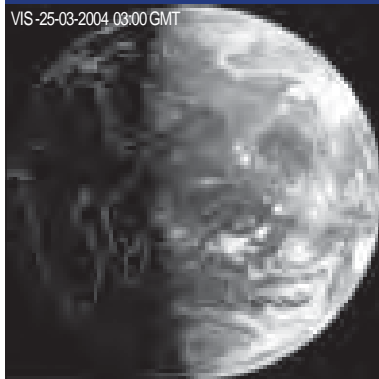
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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

VIS-25-03-2004 03:00 GMT



As we enter the dry season, the weather patterns are living up to their reputation. The entire subcontinent is sunny and bright, temperature in the plains is edging up to the 40 celsius mark, as a sign of things to come. There has been a slight easing off in maximum temperature in Kathmandu Valley as wind direction shifted slightly to a more westerly heading. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows no sign of any moisture-bearing clouds on the horizon. Clear, bright and hot days ahead. The lack of moisture means thermal updrafts don't get converted into thunderstorms, although some temporary local rain is possible along the high mountain valleys towards afternoon.

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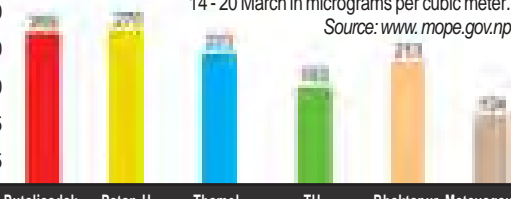
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Hits 91.2 What you burn is what you breathe.

As the dry season progresses, there is more dust in the atmosphere and as traffic volume grows all seven monitoring stations in Kathmandu Valley reported increased concentration of particles below 10 microns in diameter. These particles are so small that they lodge in the lungs and cause longterm harm. Patan Hospital has now overtaken Putali Sadak as the most polluted site in the Valley. The area recorded a weekly average (based on the daily averages) of nearly 270 PM10, up from the previous week's 236 PM10. This area registered unhealthy air marks for all seven days of the period. The highest and the lowest air pollution levels in the area were 295 PM10 on 15 March and 233 PM10 on 19 March.

Good	<60
Ok	61 to 120
Unhealthy	121 to 350
Harmful	351 to 425
Hazardous	>425

14 - 20 March in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np



रुद्धि सगरमाथाको समाचार बुझ्ने
"हालचाल"

विभाग: ४:४५, ४:४५, ५:४५, १५:४५
दिनेसो: ५:४५, १०:४५
केसको: ५:४५, १०:४५, १५:४५

सम्पूर्ण सामग्री सहित रुद्धि सगरमाथा दिवसको तयारीको सेवामा
विभाग ३ बजेटको राती ११-०५ बजेटको

HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDAY

DISCUSSIONS: Nepali Congress leaders Girija Prasad Koirala and Sushil Koirala at the central committee meeting at the party office in Teku on Thursday.



DHRUBA BASNET

FLYING THE FLAG: The CDO office in Bhojpur on Sunday after it moved to the government guest house. The first building was destroyed in the Maoist attack on 2 March.



KIRAN PANDAY

MOURNING: Family members of the late Ambassador Jaya Pratap Rana grieve on Monday after his body was brought to Kathmandu from Washington DC.



KIRAN PANDAY

MAMMOTH RALLY: Participants in a rally celebrating World Tuberculosis Day at Basantapur on Wednesday.



NEPALNEWS.COM

SPORTING CONTRIBUTIONS: Singha Bahadur Basnyat (J) holds the prize for best sportsman at the benefit for Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre held in Gokarna on Sunday.

NEPALI SOCIETY

She is one Nepali Sir Edmund Hillary can be really proud of. A student of one of Hillary's schools in Pangmo, today Bandinima Sherpa is a woman entrepreneur in a trade dominated by men. Bandinima is the first-ever woman vice president of the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN).

You could say the trekking business is in her genes: ten of Bandinima's elder brothers and sisters are all in the tourism business. But she was not content with just handling the family business, she wanted to take a leadership role. "All around me, I saw people without adequate knowledge of the business running the show in institutions like TAAN and misusing their positions," Bandinima says. She felt it was her responsibility to infiltrate the system and try to fix it from within.

It hasn't been easy. But two years after she became an executive member of TAAN, she has earned praise from even her male colleagues and was elected vice president.

It is not in Kathmandu that Bandinima feels at home. An avid trekker herself, she'd rather be up on the mountain trails leading groups, scouting for business potentials and getting a first-hand experience of the lives of porters, tea-shop owners and ensuring that the trekking industry spreads its benefits around.

Bandinima herself is living proof that there is something in the Sherpa chromosome that makes them much more adaptable to altitude. She can make short work of a 10-hour near-vertical climb of 3,500m or more, leaving even fellow-highland guides panting far below.

She has guided trekking groups



KIRAN PANDAY

On her way up

to the remotest regions of Nepal and Tibet, and is gearing up for a gruelling hike to Nar and Phu in Manang next month.

It is in Kathmandu, attending to her administrative duties at TAAN that Bandinima gets a little breathless. Asked about whether she is treated differently because she is a woman, Bandinima gives a loud laugh. We guess that's a 'no chance'.

One of Bandinima's pet peeves is Nepali laws that don't allow Nepali women citizenship rights unless they can name their fathers or husbands. Bandinima is a single mother with two children, so the citizenship question is close to her heart. She wishes the national laws were as gender-egalitarian as the norms in her own matrilineal Sherpa society.

●

(Navin Singh Khadka)

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International Day of Fools

As the world gets ready to solemnly commemorate the United Nations International Day of Fools (IDF) on 1 April, here in Nepal itself, the government has formed a 350-member April Fool's Day Celebration Main Committee headed by some of Nepal's most outstanding certified idiots. It is appropriate and proper that April Fool's Day should be celebrated with such enthusiasm and gusto in our

homeland given that we are currently living in a Fool's Paradise. Nowhere else in the world is mediocrity commemorated with such passion as it is here, with

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

groveling sycophantic newspaper columns like this one that are living proof that, as far as Nepal is concerned, every day is April First and we have a foolproof system for suffering fools.

To mark All Fools Day, which by coincidence happens to fall on 1 April this year, the Committee is planning all kinds of foolish activities that will throw light on the great strides this country has taken in making a complete ass of itself among the international community of nations. For instance, Nepali leaders will be sending out congratulatory telegrams to all fellow heads of government felicitating them on the occasion of 1 April, 2004 and wishing them many happy returns of the day.



Newspapers will bring out special April Fool Supplements, which will contain funny lies about our respected rulers in headlines like: 'Prime Minister Dozes Off At Cabinet Meeting'. Harharharhar! These April Fool headlines are so funny, yar. Luckily, we don't even have to make anything up since April Fool headlines are actually indistinguishable from non-April Fool Headlines like: 'Govt Denies Prime Minister Dozed Off At Cabinet Meeting'.

For those foolhardy enough to believe the newspapers on April Fools Day, here is a sneak preview of a headline from next week:

Nepal Has Failed Successfully: Experts

KATHMANDU – The Organisation of Failed States (OFS) has finally decided to give membership to Nepal, saying it is in recognition of the country's laudable efforts in showing the rest of the world the way backward.

Delegates from all the world's states that are proud to call themselves failed are arriving in Kathmandu next week to take part in a three-day international seminar titled 'How To Ruin Your Motherland in Five Easy Steps: A Guide for States Aspiring to Fail Spectacularly'. The conference is expected to formally approve Nepal's accession to the OFS, which brings with it many benefits such as pouring more good money after bad.

"This is indeed a great achievement, we have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory," said Phool Kumar Nepal, head of the government's April Fool's Day Celebration Main Committee. "But we can't rest on our laurels, we must rest on our pillows and go back to sleep."

The conference is also expected to pick Kathmandu as the venue for the soon to be set-up Research Institute for Failed States. The short-list of strong contenders were Lumumbashi, Timbuktu, Loubomo and Bongo-bongo, but Nepal won hands down after promising that the secretariat would be located on the landfill site on the banks of the Bishnumati to give it an authentic Turd World ambience.

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