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RIZAL

On Friday, Bhutani democracy activist Teknath Rizal will be on the fourth day of his hunger strike to protest Thimphu's refusal to take back 100,000 refugees evicted 13 years ago. Rizal wants



India and the international community to show more humanitarian concern and political will to resolve the crisis. Looking frail, Rizal told us on Thursday: "I feel a bit dizzy and am cold. But I am not going to give up until our people can return to their homeland."

Nepali political party activists who launched their own anti-royal agitation, and human rights activists have been visiting Rizal to provide moral support.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

FACEOFF

Parties are blocked while trying to march to the royal palace, while King Gyanendra tours the country

KUNDA DIXIT

Nepal's three powers are off in three different directions. While King Gyanendra was hugging babies in Lamjung, political parties were marching on his palace in Kathmandu and the Maoists were coming to terms with new threats to their free movement in India.

The king tried to defuse the political anger in his Pokhara address on Sunday by calling for poll preparations in the new Nepali year. The parties immediately saw it as yet another royal trick, and launched a more aggressive phase of their agitation to mark the anniversary of the 1990 People's Movement next week.

There is also a military stalemate. The Maoists proved they are able to inflict frontal attacks on hill towns and are gearing up to paralyse the

country next week with a three-day banda.

The Maoists' post-Beni elation must now be tempered by the arrest of senior politburo member, Mohan Baidya by Indian police in Siliguri on 28 March. Coming so soon after the extradition last month of another politburo member, Matrika Yadab, it must worry the Maoists that their hide-outs and supply lines in India are no longer secure.

The Maoists immediately tried to turn this into propaganda points by appealing to Nepali nationalism. In a statement on Wednesday, Maoist leader Prachanda said Baidya's arrest "proves there is collusion between the feudal rulers of Nepal and India over rivers and natural resources".

The Maoists, the parties and the

palace are each suspicious of the other two ganging up. Home Minister Kamal Thapa this week accused the parties of cosying up to the Maoists. Prachanda warned the parties against taking up the king's offer of elections. And the parties have all along maintained that the monarchy and the Maoists are collaborating to destroy democracy.

Political leaders reflect these rifts. "The king and parties must come together to deal with the Maoists," says Rajeswar Debkota, leader of the anti-Thapa RPP. "I see no problem with the king going around the country to meet his subjects."

Nepali Congress leader Sushil Koirala sees machinations behind the royal tours. "The felicitations show just how insensitive the king is toward the present political turmoil," he told us on Thursday. "We are not going to budge until parlia-



ment is restored and an all-party government formed."

Meanwhile, civil society groups this week unveiled a three-option roadmap for peace that includes elections, a referendum and constituent assembly. The ideas have been forwarded to the Maoist leadership, the political parties and the government. ●

Times nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 130

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

Total votes: 968

Weekly Internet Poll # 131. To vote go to: www.nepalnews.com

Q. Is it right for the government to reject United Nations mediation?

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Maoist gameplan

All signs point to a protracted conflict in which the Maoists try to improve their bargaining position in future talks

FUTILE FUTURE

At any other time, in any other place, the brinkmanship the palace and parties are displaying could be construed as just plain politics. The argument is about the democratic process: did or didn't King Gyanendra act unconstitutionally to sack a prime minister in October 2002, and what should be done to restore the political status quo.

Allowing this division to fester at a time when the country is teetering on the edge is gross recklessness. Such bizarre bickering is like wrestling on the balcony of a house that is on fire. Listening to their rhetoric and intemperate language, one would think that neither the king nor the party leaders are fully aware (or care) that the flames are licking at the floorboards and the balcony is on the verge of collapse. What point is a power struggle in which both sides will be consumed?

It is difficult to say who is more obdurate here. In Pokhara, the king proposed and the parties opposed. Earlier, the party leadership proposed a common candidate for prime minister, which the king opposed. How long can this tit-for-tat go on?

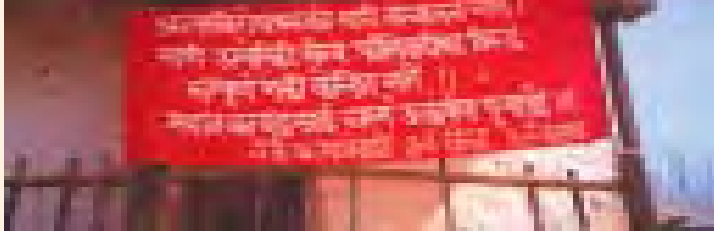
The people have not joined the political parties' agitation on the streets. The king seems to think this translates into support for his move. It doesn't. The people may not be able to articulate it, but they want a system that has their representation because it is the only way to lasting peace. And that means elections.

By their outright rejection of even the possibility of polls, the party leadership is painting itself needlessly into a corner. The parties still can't understand why the citizens are so disillusioned with them, they haven't figured out that for a majority of people the word 'democracy' is now synonymous with greed and power. The people's message is that they will not support the parties' anti-king agitation unless the politicians publicly admit their past blunders and demonstrate that they have truly reformed. So far, no signs of it. If their conscience won't allow them to patch up with the king, the parties could come up with ideas on restarting the peace process, showing they can be united in common cause to address the people's number one concern.

The Maoists have now gone beyond trying to woo public support. When asked why they are punishing a people who have already suffered enough, their leaders use the labour pain analogy. Giving birth is painful and dangerous, they say. But the way the revolution is headed, it is looking more and more like a still-born delivery where the mother also loses her life.

Assuming all three forces now realise that this is a dead-end, all three need to yield more. The Maoists must see time is not on their side: the longer this drags on, the more they need to use force, violence and abductions to get the people to obey their diktat. As for the party leadership and the king, the sooner they give up their stubborn on-upmanship and join forces the better it will be for them both, and for the Nepali people.

Maoist banner last week in Sindbupalchok denouncing the 'fascist Royal American Army'.



DHRUBA BASNET

It has been three years since the Maoists made their first attack on a district headquarter in Dunai in September 2000. Since then, there have been Jumla, Mangalsen, Sandhikharka, Salleri, Bhojpur and now Beni. They have also suffered defeats: Rujatar, Kapurkot, Ratmate, Kusum and Bhalubang.

Bhojpur and Beni were not just a Maoist demonstration that they are not yet militarily vanquished. They were also the first attacks after the police, armed police and army have been put under a unified command. The Maoists have perfected their warfare techniques and showed that their tactic of using overwhelming numbers to overrun district headquarters still works.

Last January, when the Maoists agreed to a ceasefire, they claimed to have reached a 'strategic equilibrium' with the army. A year later, it looks like they are now in Mao's 'strategic offensive' stage. They have learnt that prolonging the strategic equilibrium allows government forces time to rearm and grow.

The three-pronged Maoist strategy has been to launch major offensives in the hill towns, support that with mobilisation along the tarai and use attacks in Kathmandu Valley for publicity value. Mao Zedong's doctrine was to strangle the towns, and this is what his Nepali chelas are now doing through highway blockades and bandas, enforcing them with landmines and arson on trucks and buses.

The strikes and blockades of

GUEST COLUMN
Puskar Gautam



the cities, however, have cost the rebels considerable public support since ordinary people have been hit hardest. It has exposed warlordism, anarchy and a descent into criminality among the rank and file. But the Maoists must see that their larger goal of keeping up the psychological pressure on Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara by cutting off Chitwan is working. The blockades also have a military purpose in reducing army movement along the tarai highways and thereby allowing greater freedom to launch operations in their heartland.

The use of landmines, ambushes and blockades have caused civilian casualties and cost the rebels public support. But the comrades must reckon that the severe restrictions this has put on the military's movement, forcing it to use helicopters, is worth some bad PR. The war is now becoming increasingly 'air-to-ground' with the danger of greater civilian casualties.

In the coming months, the Maoists can be expected to spread their presence in the strategic valleys of Dang and Chitwan in central Nepal, Surkhet in the west and Udaypur in the east. They will try to further decimate the presence of the political parties at the grassroots. All this won't just buy the Maoists time, but will also force the international

community to take notice of the bloody, headline-grabbing attacks.

Whatever the Maoists may claim about their 'strategic offensive', it is clearly a military stalemate. Since it entered the fray in November 2001, the Royal Nepali Army has not really launched any major offensive against the Maoists. Its posture has been defensive, reacting with cordon-and-search and blocking manoeuvres after Maoist attacks, and raiding hideouts. Such limited action doesn't shorten a war, it lengthens it.

At the political level, the Maoists are cleverly dividing the palace and the parties. They allow royal felicitation ceremonies to go ahead, providing the opportunity for the king to bash the parties. Then they ratchet up the republican rhetoric, egging the anti-regression street agitators to greater radicalism. All this while they kill and threaten grassroots political parties.

At the international level, the Maoists are still cosying up to India. The neighbour that the Maoists used to insult as a "hegemonic, expansionist India" is now "our good neighbour". The Maoist reaction was muted even when Matrika Yadav and Suresh Alemagar and lately Mohan Baidya were caught. The Beni attack achieved the purpose of provoking a reaction from the US State Department which called for talks,

LETTERS

TARNISHED

Re: 'Nepal's tarnished image' (#187) It seems that a complete lack of strategy is the hallmark of Nepal's descent into hell. A severe lack of good governance and abuse of basic human rights, not to mention corruption, makes it quite clear that the government is the Maoists' best friend. The Maoists turned themselves into a terrorist organisation long ago and now it looks like the government is following suit. Why is there no reaction at all from HMG, where is the king, the prime minister? It

seems that the strategy is to turn a blind eye and let the killings escalate. Kathmandu might look safe, but outside the Valley it is defacto Maoist rule. The political parties have long disgraced themselves with near-criminal negligence and infighting. Nepalis are so tired of politicians that a revolution is a better alternative to corrupt incapable politicians who were in parliament. Now, with the increased violence even the tourists may stop coming. So, the Maoist have achieved a great success: forcing the Nepalis to face even

more hardships. Congratulations to the Maoists for successfully creating a new North Korea, Kampuchea, Eritrea. You have killed 10,000 people, 100,000 more may die. How many more children do you want to recruit, how many more orphans do you want to make before you call off you stop this insane war?

Lars Gundersen, email

DISMAYED

I was perplexed, intrigued and dismayed by Yubaraj Ghimire's Capital Letters column 'Between Bhojpur and Beni' (#189) where he has mistakenly accused the RNA in Beni of not assisting the police. Let me tell clarify to your readers that it was actually the bravery of the RNA soldiers at the gun post on the rooftop of the police base that repelled the fiercest attacks till dawn. Also, RNA soldiers laid down their lives guarding the CDO and DDC offices. The soldier lived up to their motto 'It is better to die than be a coward' and fought valiantly. Such baseless accusations stain the sacred souls of the soldiers who gave their lives to protect the government installations in Beni.

Ajaya Thapa, email

Yubaraj Ghimire's 'Scandalous silence' (#188) highlights the dilemma faced by the mainstream political parties whose campaign against the so-called 'royal regression' is slowly but surely losing steam. Owning up to their past mistakes (as some of them have done belatedly) will achieve nothing but further damage to their already shattered credibility. The Nepali people might be willing to forgive their wrongdoings, but very few will ever trust them again with the reins of power. By saying the political parties 'must convince the people that they no longer think the king is the villain of this piece, but a partner in the process...' Ghimire sent a clear message to the politicians: if you can't fight 'em, join 'em!

'Arjun', email

SURPRISED

The Maoists have understandably demonstrated their violence to put pressure on the government to agree to a ceasefire, rebuild morale in their organisation ('Bad blood in Beni', #189). Yet, the political parties are in their usual grab

power back do-or-die mode, but mostly it is 'die'. The Maoists have already hoodwinked the Nepalis twice and the parties have been toying with the mass movement for the past year without any result.

It is very surprising none of the political parties, the Maoist or even the columnists and reporters in your paper have credited or realised that it is 'people power' that will ultimately decide the fate of Nepal, its king and parties. It is the common people who fought for the ouster of the panchayat with their life and ushered in the parties to power.

These very people are ignoring the parties in their 'anti-regression' struggle. It is punishment for 12 years of misrule. No matter how well your columnists present their thoughts, views and arguments in very readable articles with sound analysis and foresight, it is the people who finally decide what is right for the country and they cannot be ignored. They will not be swayed by self-appointed opinion-makers or outside powers. The people, in their infinite



THOMAS BELL

prompting the comrades to take this as a step towards political recognition.

It is now clear that without India, the United States and Britain, the government and the army are unable to financially and militarily fight this insurrection. Internationally, the Maoist leadership has been trying to present the image of a group not necessarily prone to violence by offering to accept UN mediation.

All this because the leadership knows that in the global geopolitical climate, there is no way the international community will countenance a militarily-installed Maoist republic in Nepal. This is why all their current activities are geared towards transforming themselves militarily as the most powerful political force in Nepal—one that everyone has to reckon with. ●

This analysis is translated from the Nepali original that appeared in Himal Khabarpatrika this week.



A clash of values

Elections are important, but reinstating parliament is imperative

The call of duty, loyalty towards leadership and the privileges of paternalism are values all totalitarian ideologies seek to cultivate. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia had Brother Number One, the Chinese Communists had their Chairman and North Korea's Juchhe followers have their Dear Leader. Comrade Prachanda calls himself 'president'.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



In totalitarian as well as authoritarian systems, there is no place for dissent of any kind. If the insurgents think certain human rights activists are sympathetic towards political parties, they will

not be allowed to enter areas under their control. Ganesh Chiluwal was killed because he had the courage to burn the effigies of Maoist divinities.

Authoritarian monarchists may show a higher degree of tolerance (the fact these lines are even allowed to be published is a sign) but they refuse to extend the minimum courtesy towards politicians preaching the values of democracy. Unlike his earlier speeches in Biratnagar, Dhangadi, and Nepalganj, King Gyanendra refrained from criticising the political parties in Pokhara. But palace-friendly propagandists are still as shrill as ever in denouncing the struggle for the restoration of people's sovereignty.

The Pokhara speech failed to incite spontaneous applause from the sparse audience that stewed in the fierce sun. Pokhara and its environs were closed down by a Maoist banda, and the king failed to come up with ideas to resolve the conflict, or raise hopes for the restoration of democratic order.

Other than a vague call on everyone concerned to "create the environment" for elections to be held within next twelve months, a royal commitment to constitutional monarchy and people's sovereignty was missing.

The result is that the king appears as resolute as ever to protect the "historical legacy" of his "great forefathers". The allusion, not a promise in any way, of polls needs to be seen in that perspective. Such an unwavering

adherence to tradition is quite natural for monarchists. Practitioners of democratic politics draw their inspiration from the French Revolution (liberty, equality, fraternity). The monarchists' chant of duty, loyalty, and paternalism also seems to have a Gallic origin: the Vichy slogan of 'travail, famille, patrie'. These are values that King Gyanendra has been stressing since the day he took over on 4 October.

The Maoists and monarchists may be fighting for their own interests, but their values are essentially the same: primacy of arms, the undisputed supremacy of the ruler, one ideology and an unquestioned chain of command. With such convergence, no wonder monarchists shy away from directly criticising the Maoists.

Politics, however, is about pluralism. In a dynamic society, ideas must compete. A clash of values and divergent views are natural in social systems. Totalitarian despots seek to crush such dissent through intimidation and terror. Authoritarian rulers try to suppress it through a combination of inducement and fear. But both have a common abhorrence for the contest of ideas.

News reports this week that Maoist leaders are in constant touch with the Royal Nepali Army top brass is therefore quite plausible. A temporary truce between the two isn't as unlikely

as it appears. The monarchists and Maoists therefore have a fundamental disagreement with democratic mainstreamers: it is a conflict of values over the principles of governance, a contest between the power of the bullet and ballot. This is an irreconcilable dissonance.

The insistence by diplomats from donor countries that all constitutional forces must get together to fight the insurgents is flawed. The king has no patience for a constitutional role, and the political parties can't see how a 'constructive' monarch can be constitutional. Unless this contradiction is resolved, the possibility of "free and fair" polls that King Gyanendra wants will remain distant.

The ground reality is that with every violent attack, the Maoists (whatever their real intentions) help the monarch consolidate his position. Thus, neither an election nor an understanding between the monarchists and the insurgents can end the challenges to democracy. To balance anarchy and monarchy, mainstream politics must be restored to centrastage. Pathways of progress are full of twists and turns. The king's way of peace—shanti ko rajmarga—is no roadmap. It is a mirage.

Elections are important, but the reactivation of constitutional process through the reinstatement of parliament is even more imperative. ●

wisdom, know whom to support, ignore and oppose.

Chandra Man Singh, Kathmandu

ASHAMED

Most party leaders wasted no time in lambasting the king's speech in Pokhara, calling it an attempt to strengthen his 'regressive' moves. They also cast aspersions on the king's commitment to the constitution and democracy. What of their own commitment to democracy? Did the parties ever show any accountability and responsibility towards the people who elected them? By calling themselves 'democratic' they are making fun of the word 'democracy'. Every election parties comes up with election manifestos which would theoretically make them the best party in the world. We Nepalis have been innocent enough to be taken in by our leaders. We don't question their promises and set goals and deadlines. Another election comes around and they show us the same dream again, dupe us, and fight for ministerial positions. No government since 1990 lasted its full five-year term. This is not democracy, when the leaders have

never begun to address the basic needs of the people. And finally, they were responsible for bringing the country to a state of civil war. Still, they want to be back in power in the name of democracy! Shame on them.

Pravesh Saria, email

ENCOURAGED

Re: 'An eye for an eye' by Naresh Newar (#188). Although the article is very well written it does not define the legal status of the Tilganga Eye Centre and therefore readers may have been misled into thinking that it is a foreign-run organisation. Nepalis generally don't believe a Nepali-run organisation can run so well. TYC is not a traditional INGO with high salaries and perks for employees. It does not have any expatriate staff, although the board has some non-Nepalis. TYC is unique because it is a Nepali-run regional body mandated to work internationally. I hope Newar's article will succeed in motivating the Nepali government and non-government outfits to emulate TYC's example.

Purna Sinjali, email

Selling sex to survive



NARESH NEWAR

As the last bus leaves Ratna Park at 9PM, the street is suddenly quiet and empty with only armed police and a couple of taxis around.

An hour later, a group of pre-teens suddenly appears. Flanked by a gang of pimps, the young girls wait around in the sidewalks. Standing close to them is an older woman, in her 30s, taking a chance as well. The girls start teasing her: "Look at her, I

bet no one will take her," says one of the girls. The others burst out laughing.

A group of fully-decorated gay sex workers walks by and warn the girls that the police are on the prowl. They shuffle off towards the overhead bridge near Bir Hospital to hide behind the staircase. "Same old problem. Why don't they leave us alone," mutters one of the girls as a police van approaches.

An increase in the influx of people from the districts fleeing the

conflict, the lack of jobs and poverty have all contributed to a new surge in prostitution in Kathmandu Valley. But two months ago, the police started cracking down, especially along stretches of street around Tundikhel, Khichapokhri and Sundhara. But that just shifted the action indoors: to massage parlors, cabin restaurants and cheap lodges.

At a cabin restaurant in Maiti Devi, several girls and women told us that they fled their villages fearing the Maoists who were trying to force

them to join military training. "My parents are still in the village, but I took the risk and came to Kathmandu, even though I know no one here," says 17-year-old Sarita Chettri from Makwanpur.

Two of Sarita's friends also joined her and they all work in the cabin restaurant, which is a front for prostitution. The three don't get a salary, but the tips are enough to make a living. "I got used to the clients touching me, and fell in love with a 20-year-old guy," Sarita

confesses. She took him to her one-room flat, but after that never saw him again. Instead, he started sending his friends to the restaurant to be her clients.

Sarita is now the most popular waitress. Seeing her income rise, her friends have followed in her footsteps. The restaurant has been raided several times by the vice squad, but Sarita and her friends are still in business. The manager bails them out when they get arrested since the girls are the main attraction in a restaurant that has a 200 percent markup on food and drinks.

There hasn't been a formal study of cabin restaurants in the valley, but one estimate puts the number of girls at up to 30,000. After 7PM, the streets of Gaushala, Baneswor, Maiti Devi, Kalanki, Rato Pul and Chahabil are bright with the glittering lights of restaurants blaring Hindi songs. Inside, the restaurants have wooden cubicles with a girl already inside each of them.

Meanwhile, in the tourist hub of Thamel, local residents are worried that massage parlours are fronting as sex shops. The police closed down a large number of massage parlours three years ago, but new ones have now taken their place. "There are more girls than before working as sexual masseurs," says Rabi Shakya, a local shop owner. "It's getting a bit embarrassing living here."

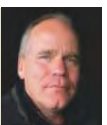
It's not the humiliation, but the threat of HIV infection that is of

Fat food nation?

Nepal has a long way to go, but is that where we want to be?

Someone once observed that the West is full of fat people wanting to be skinny, while people from developing countries would simply love to grow a paunch and a wide pair of hips. Like all aphorisms, there are elements of truth here. I'd like to take it one step further. In America, the poor are overweight and rich slim and trim. Nepalis, Botswanans and Hondurans, by contrast, are thin if they're

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



poor, pudgy if they have money.

Fat is definitely a class issue here in the USA. Drive the backstreets of various Miami neighborhoods, as I do, and judge the median income by examining posteriors. Wiggly, sagging ones belong—almost invariably—to the non-white, working poor, the immigrant, the trailer-park folk who are proud only of their white skin and European descent. Rich areas, when the security let you in, are chockablock with exercising semi-athletic fifty-somethings, svelte and fit, barely sweating into designer gym clothes.

A recent study rings alarm bells for an overweight society.

Nearly 60 percent of children, it found, are putting on dangerous amounts of

weight. It's called the 'super-size' culture. Go to McDonalds, order a milkshake, burger and French fries and for a few extra dollars, 'super size' your lunch. In French fries alone, you're getting 400 more calories of food energy. The less said about the national habit of drinking two and three litre soft drinks, the better. But I will ask one rhetorical question: where do people find the bladder space to put all that cola?

The quantity of food delivered up in a single plate serving in American fast food restaurants over the past twenty years has gone up by more than 60 percent. And that's before the super-size. European visitors to the US are frequently shocked by the huge plates of food that restaurants offer, and the popularity of 'all you can eat' buffets. Much of the anger in France towards American burger joints is less

about the nationality of the company than the way in which the entire ethic of fast food attacks the French notion of dining, enjoyment and quality. Again though, it's the American working folk who demand this cheap food in vast quantities. Many rich Americans are almost honorary Frenchmen when it comes to what they eat.

Just down the street from McDonalds,

Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken and all the rest, pop into the sort of trendy bistros and cafe's favored by the rich and see what they're eating. Why, tiny quantities of exquisitely prepared Nouvelle Cuisine, Italian-Thai fusion and so on. They even take salad over potatoes, carrots over rice. All drizzled nicely in aged Balsamic vinegar and garnished with sun dried Porcini mushrooms, of course. The people bent over the plates, chewing, are usually thin and fully aware of what they eat each day. Nor do they wash the food down with beakers of soda pop. A diminishing few sip fine wine, but mostly it's bubbly mineral water, devoid of calories or fat-making potential.

A few Americans have tried to sue the fast food industry for making them fat. Poor people using lawyers to redress imbalances in a grand American tradition. But food in the US is a matter of freedom of choice, and the courts are having none of it. Congress in Washington is debating a law to ban such lawsuits. Give it a thought next time you tuck into some dal bhat. Think how far Nepal has to go before it joins the developed world. And wonder if it's really the place to be. ●



UN-interested in mediation

Nepal has been peacekeeping for the UN, the UN may now have to peacekeep in Nepal

As conflict between the security forces and Maoist rebels intensifies in Nepal, the voice for peace is also getting stronger. Joining the peace chorus last week was UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who not only called for the end of the conflict, but also offered help to mediate. The offer, however, has sparked a debate in Nepal about the whether the UN can, or should, play such a role.

Most of the political parties of the dissolved parliament have welcomed Annan's offer. They say it could be an opportunity to establish peace in the country. The UML's Jhalnath Khanal believes UN mediation has become crucial given the widening mistrust among the political forces in the country. "In such a situation, the UN can certainly play a positive role to bring the conflicting parties together for a ceasefire and peace talks."

India, China and the United States are all said to be against UN involvement. India, for instance, has argued that third party mediation would legitimise the rebel group. But some international affairs experts say UN involvement would actually forestall interference by regional or world powers in Nepal. "With two regional powers as our immediate neighbours, we need to make sure that no foreign power enters our country. That is why the world body would be the right mechanism for mediation," explains foreign policy analyst Hiranya Lal Shrestha.

Others disagree, saying the UN's own charter doesn't allow mediation. "The UN's Security Council Proposal 1373 has clearly stated that the violent activities of the rebels is terrorism, by that definition the rebels are terrorists," says Nepali Congress leader Ram Sharan Mahat. "With such provision in its own proposal, how the UN will be able to mediate in a conflict that has one of the party as terrorists, I don't understand."

Another provision, Article 2 (7), of the UN charter also states that the world body will not take part in the domestic affairs of a country as long as it does not become an international security threat. "Since the Maoist insurgency is not yet recognised as international security threat, the UN cannot mediate because the problem still remains Nepal's internal matter," argues former Upper House member Dipta Prakash Shah.

With such divisive interpretations of its charter, how can the UN help? Annan's statement released last week does not carry details, but the UN's resident coordinator in Nepal, Matthew Kahane, says the help could range from building trust in both the sides to facilitating a resumption of the peace process. "There can be so many ways, but it is often done in low key as we did in Namibia, Cambodia and Guatemala, among others," Kahane says.

For whatever kind of help, the UN would require both the parties in the conflict to make a formal request for its mediation. The Maoists have always voiced a need for the UN's presence for different options ranging from peace talks to constituent assembly elections and even to demobilisation of the military force of both the sides.

The government, however, believes that Nepal has not yet exhausted its internal means to deal with the insurgency. In response to Annan's latest offer, Home Minister Kamal Thapa had this to say: The government is examining the pros and cons of such an offer, we will soon decide about it." ● (Navin Singh Khadka)



MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

Saving Sagarmatha

There isn't much garbage now on the world's most popular trekking route

MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

The international media has had a great time calling it the 'toilet paper trail', or 'the world's highest garbage dump'.

What a relief it is, therefore, to see that not only is there very little garbage on the Khumbu trail, but that there is an active movement to reduce trash along one of the world's most popular trekking routes.

"There is no pollution in the Khumbu region and the trails leading up to Base Camp are clean and trash-free," says second-time visitor Anuar Suun, a professor from a Malaysian university who is here to lead the Malaysian Youth Everest Expedition to Mt Everest for the second time.

"It is true that in the 1980s, things got a little out of hand," admits Dorje Lama Sherpa of the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC). "But we now realise that our livelihood depends on keeping the trails clean."

Established in 1994 by local Sherpas, the SPCC was set up jointly by the Ministry of Tourism and

Civil Aviation in Kathmandu and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The idea was to set up garbage disposal sites along the trail and at regular camping sites and establish an efficient system of recycling or removing waste. Between 1994 to 2003, the SPCC has already removed more than 2,000 tonnes of garbage from the Sagarmatha National Park.

All along the trail, there are rubbish bins with concrete foundations (to prevent leakage) and bamboo lattice cylinders to contain the trash. The garbage collected is deposited at incinerators in Tengboche, Namche and Lukla. Last year was the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Mt Everest and saw

record numbers of trekkers and mountaineers in Khumbu who dumped 325,000kg of trash. Of this, 240,000 was incinerated, and the rest was made up of metal, bottles and cans that the SPCC ferried to Kathmandu for reuse or recycling.

"Our aim is increase community participation in environmental conservation and community awareness in garbage management at the local level," explains Bisu Bajracharya of the SPCC.

With trekking traffic picking up this season, it looks like the numbers may hit an all-time high, but the SPCC seems geared up to meet the challenge. Each mountaineering expedition has to register their material at the SPCC office in



LUIS PAULO FERRAZ

Expedition material is inspected at Syangboche by the SPCC (top) and the rare sight of trash near a campsite in Gokyo.

Syangboche airfield before leaving for base camp and check back on return. They are charged a deposit of \$4,000 for Mt Everest, \$3,000 for mountains 8,000m and higher, and \$2,000 for mountains above 7,000m.

A mountain inspection officer monitors the garbage situation of the expeditions at base camps, on the lookout for any unauthorised dumping along the glaciers and crevasses. If anyone is caught, deposits are confiscated. Expeditions which follow the rules are given Garbage Clearance certificates, which have actually become a popular souvenir and are framed by proud mountaineers when they get home.

Inspectors are not just on the

lookout for improper garbage disposal, they also monitor fuel and firewood use. High altitude forests take a long time to regenerate and the SPCC helps the National Park monitor the transport of firewood and the use of juniper bushes for campfires, especially by porters. Kerosene depots have been set up along the trail, and LPG gas has been made available to high-energy consuming locals, trekking lodges and even some larger expeditions.

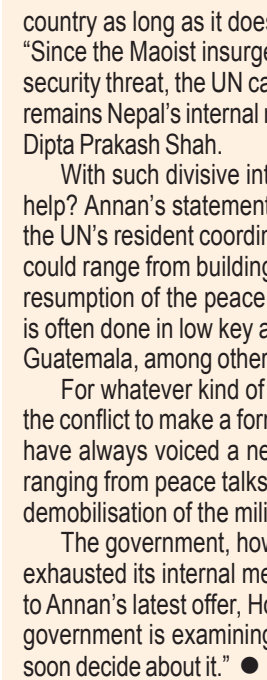
The SPCC's main source of income is an innovative revenue-generating idea: rebuilding the Khumbu Icefall route on Mt Everest at the beginning of every season and maintaining it. Expeditions then pay a fixed amount of toll to use the route while they go up and down from the summit.

The Khumbu Icefall is a constantly shifting jumble of seracs and ice the size of apartment blocks. Negotiating the icefall takes time and saps the energy of expeditions, so they let the SPCC do it for them.

In the spring of 2003, there were 26 expeditions

on Mt Everest and Lhotse and the SPCC charged \$2,875 from each expedition for the use of its route, which consisted of fixed-rope and ladder bridge sections. In the autumn season last year there were only six expeditions and they were charged \$6,000 for the route. This spring season, there are some 15 expeditions and the rate has been fixed at \$2,500.

Now, the SPCC is getting even more ambitious and wants to monitor garbage at Advanced Base Camp and Camps I and II in the Western Cwm to check if expeditions take down everything they brought up. One thing the SPCC wants to work on right away is a public toilet at Base Camp. ●



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Victimised victims



NARESH NEWAR

Last year, Ram Gopal Tamauli was shot and stabbed by a group of Maoists after he refused to join their movement in a village in Banke.

He tried to argue that he did not believe in violence, but was attacked with swords and guns. Emboldened by his courage, hundreds of villagers pounced on the Maoists and killed two of them. Ram Gopal was bleeding profusely from his wounds and was rushed to Bheri Hospital in Nepalganj where he collapsed on arrival. "I thought I was dead," says Ram Gopal, showing his scars. "I don't know how I survived."

After that incident, the villagers of Tamauli asked Ram Gopal to leave because they feared the Maoists would return. And they did. About 500 Maoists came back and killed Ram Gopal's uncle, Motilal Tamauli, and beat a neighbour, Sohan Yadab, to death. They tied up hundreds of villagers

From top to bottom:

"Enough is enough," says Kul Bahadur Khatri.

Hira Gurung with her 7-year old daughter Sanish

Ram Gopal Tamauli shows his scar from gunshot

Dharma Raj Neupane at the Maoist Victims' Association flanked by photographs of killed civilians

Preyed on by Maoists, victims of violence face official apathy

and made them watch the torture of three young boys. Their legs were placed on rocks and crushed.

"What kind of revolution is this?" asks Ram Gopal, who abandoned his shop and homestead to live as a refugee in Kathmandu. His wife, three sons and parents are destitutes in Nepalganj. Ram Gopal has now joined the Maoist Victims' Association (MVA) and says there is nothing to do but to find strength in numbers.

But it hasn't been easy for Maoist victims even in the capital, and their association suffered a severe blow when Maoist assassins killed their president, Ganesh Chiluwal outside his office on 15 February, two days after he led a procession where effigies of Maoist leaders were burnt. Dharma Raj Neupane is a Nepali Congress worker who had to flee his village in Accham after 200 Maoists surrounded his house and were looking for him. "I was lucky to get out alive," says Dharma Raj, who has now taken over from Chiluwal as president of the MVA. Last Friday, Dharma Raj received a death threat from the Maoists and was warned to close the office. "We are not afraid anymore," Dharma Raj told us. "We have nothing left but our courage and pride."

Despite Chiluwal's assassination, anyone can walk in and out of the

MVA's office in Bagh Bazar. Requests for government security have been made, but the office hasn't even been assigned a constable. For Ram Gopal Tamauli, this is proof that officials have no interest in protecting the victims of Maoists. "We have given up expecting anything but apathy from the government," he says. A local NGO is paying the rent for the office and members have been forced to beg for donations in the streets from pedestrians and shops. After the Chiluwal murder and threats, MVA has got 100 new members, bringing the total number to 6,000.

"The government has established camps and rehabilitation centres for the Maoists who surrender but it has not bothered about us," says 76-year old Kul Bahadur Khatri from Dang, who came to Kathmandu this week after he was nearly killed by his own son, who is a Maoist. Khatri is heartbroken that his three sons have become supporters of the same group that abducted and tortured him four years ago after he refused to pay them Rs 300,000. He was abducted again this year but managed to escape at night. He walked for two days from Salyan to Nepalganj where he had started

begging on the streets. An army officer helped him, and put him on a bus to Kathmandu where he is now living with friends.

Like other Maoist victims, Kul Bahadur has given up all hope of help from the government. "Even human rights activists are not speaking for us," he says. "All they do is raise their voices against the state. What about us and those responsible for the violation of our rights?"

Displaced families and Maoist victims line up at the association office every day hoping to get some money, but all it can do is give them moral support and solidarity. "How much longer can we live like this?" asks a tearful Hira Gurung, who fled her village in Khotang. Hugging her nine-year old daughter, Hira tells us how her husband was killed during a meeting three years ago. The next day, the Maoists announced they would also kill her for being an informer. Leaving behind all her family property, Hira fled to Kathmandu with her five children and is now living with distant relatives.

Ram Gopal Tamauli and other members of the association approached Home Minister Kamal Thapa recently for assistance and protection, and have been assured help. "We wonder when the government will do anything for us," says Ram Gopal with a sigh. "Maybe after we are all dead." ●



ALL PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

Resister killed

The government's move to arm villagers against Maoist rebels suffered a setback with the killing of the chairman of the Peace, Security and Good Governance Committee in Chulachuli village of Ilam district, Chetan Raj Bantaba (pic). He was gunned down in broad daylight in Damak on 23 March, and the suspected Maoist assassins even took away the pistol Chetan Raj was given by the army.

It was the same pistol he had used to defend himself when the rebels had attacked him three months ago. After his death, his wife and three daughters are now left to fend

for themselves. "They had been repeatedly sending death threats to my husband," Chetan Raj's wife, Tika Maya, said.

With Chetan Raj dead, the 13-member Maoist-resistance committee he set up is now leaderless. Committee members aged 13-65 go on regular patrols around the village, sometimes even joining the unified command under the army. Chetan Raj formed the committee last November following Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa's announcement that the government would arm civilian volunteers who wanted to resist the Maoists.

Members of the committee in Chulachuli village had been receiving arms and weapons training, and Chetan Raj Bantaba used to say the arms were for self-defense and not to kill the rebels. "Our guns are not to kill anyone, they are to defend ourselves," he would explain. Even before the government provided them arms, the villagers here used to carry homemade guns to resist the rebels' influence. Lately, Chetan Raj's armed civilian volunteer group was involved in a controversy after the chief of Damak Municipality lodged a complaint alleging that he was involved in timber poaching. ●

(Dambar Krishna Shrestha in Ilam)



BIZ NEWS

China to Nepal

Air China inaugurated its new Chengdu-Kathmandu link on 30 March, making it the second Nepal-China link after Lhasa. Chengdu is a hub with flight connections to many parts of China. The Kathmandu branch Air China office hopes to attract Japanese tourists to Nepal through this new route as the Chengdu airport is frequented with direct flights from key Japanese cities. Air China, operating two flights a week, will add more during the peak season. The airline had already organized a big promotional campaign last year among the Chinese tourists. The flight will follow the same scenic route past Mt Everest as the Kathmandu-Lhasa flight which will be a bonus for passengers. Air China is using its 757 Boeing with a seating capacity of 196 passengers.

Saving from overseas

Everest Bank Ltd (EBL) has established its representative in New Delhi and started active operations, canvassing for low cost transfer of savings of Nepalis working in India. Nepalis can now process their applications through EBL's partner, Punjab National Bank in India, where they can deposit their monthly savings and transfer them to EBL in Nepal.

Smart banking choices

A new agreement between SmartChoice Technologies (SCT) and Himalayan Bank Limited (HBL) means that HBL customers in Nepal can now use SCT's current network of 10 ATM's and 100 point of sales terminals throughout the Valley. A variety of card schemes are available, and the alliance is aimed to be helpful in transforming traditional cash-based transactions into simpler cashless plastic ones.

NEW PRODUCTS

MUNCHA ONLINE: Muncha House, the oldest departmental store in Nepal, has launched local e-shopping at www.muncha.com. Over 6,000 items are available, ranging from food to electronics. Products are delivered directly to your home, and consumers who don't have credit cards can pay cash upon checking and verifying the goods are satisfactory.



ON DISPLAY: Philips has opened a one-of-a-kind showroom at Jyoti Bhawan, Kantipath to provide its customers with better sales and service facilities. It includes a home theatre demonstration room and carries a wide range of Philips products ranging from 14" tvs to the latest LCD and plasma display units.



STRENGTH OF STYLE: The newly launched Proton Waja is set to take on Nepal's roads with style and confidence. Elegant lines mask the strength of its body, while minimising road vibrations and noise. The 1.6-liter engine is economical to ride, and its special safety features will give you complete peace of mind as the Waja confidently tackles the road.



Thinking small

Small players are neglected in Nepal, and nobody benefits

Last week, my colleagues and I spoke to about 40 different owners of Kathmandu-based small and medium Nepali businesses on how they use money-related services to improve business performance.

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



Most had nothing but complaints. Many told stories of how they face needless but repeated and costly harassment from tax officers, from policemen on and off duty and from local politicians. Almost all said that they have no use for formal banking channels, which they see as remote and unfriendly, designed only for big businesses. And all said that they buy auditing services grudgingly. In fact, most admitted that the owners also double up as in-house accountants who keep a loose log of daily accounts on the back of torn cigarette-boxes.

Unhelpful though the government is, these businesses start dealing with it right from birth. In most cases, they are required to pay fees for registration at both the Municipality Office and the Department of Cottage Industry which charge money arbitrarily to renew their licenses. The businesses complain that they have not received a single tangible service, for all their dutiful payment. Yet they go through the

registration process because they have discovered that the papers thus obtained are good as an sign of state approval in the event of all too common warrant-less raids and searches, that ratchets up the cost of doing business.

Most of these businesses—bus-park hotels, security firms and agencies that supply labour to overseas markets—deal with millions of rupees every month. Yet they prefer doing business with the money stuffed in their pockets. Other than seeing banks as places where they can deposit money and earn an annual



interest, they have little idea as to how to make demands on the financial institutions to provide them with money-related services.

Financial institutions have also displayed a poor understanding of small business needs, let alone have done an appropriate marketing of their services and products. Banks have been slow to exploit opportunities to bring hitherto neglected but cash-rich clients into their fold. Given how competitive the banking sector has become recently, it is short-

sighted to think that many small businesses might not be as lucrative as a few big trading houses. Meanwhile, in the face of such indifference, the preferred way of raising cash for small businesses is to borrow from colleagues and money-lenders, even at high interest rates, and ignore the formal channels of finance.

Most small business owners rightly fear that if they keep up-to-date books and use legitimate numbers, then the government might squeeze more money out of them. Their accepted business practice is to keep two sets of

books: one for the business and one to show to the government. As for auditing, most use registered auditors (doesn't matter whether of 'B' or 'C' class) who can both balance the books and, more importantly, are on excellent terms with tax

officers. They are not sure how to ask more of their auditors (who can double up as financial consultants) in advice on cutting down expenses and managing money better.

There is much talk in the policy circles about how to help small businesses. Some talk about marketing, others about skill-enhancement. But our discussions show that addressing many of the money-related policy constraints (ambiguous laws, unclear tax codes, inaccessible credit lines, etc) would be a good place start for the government to take the concerns of small businesses seriously. ●

Finally, yummy airline food

A Lufthansa subsidiary invests in-flight catering in Kathmandu

KHADGA SINGH

Passengers flying out of the Tribhuvan International Airport who passed on the breakfast tray now have something to look forward to.

This week, the world's largest in-flight catering company, LSG Sky Chefs, is launching a joint venture with Soaltee Inflight Catering to supply in-flight meals from a state-of-the-art facility near Kathmandu airport.

LSG Sky Chefs is a subsidiary of Lufthansa and Soaltee Hotel and has over 25 years experience in providing meals for airlines departing from Kathmandu. The facility at Tilganga has the capacity to produce 4,000 meals a day, but will start with 1,800 meals for Royal Nepal Airlines, Qatar Airways, Austrian Airlines, Indian Airlines and various charter operators flying out of Kathmandu.

LSG Regional Director, Michael Malchartzeck is in Kathmandu this week for the launch of the facility, and says his company sees a lot of potential for growth in the subcontinent's air travel market. "We wish to widen our market and for that we see Nepal as the right place," Malchartzeck told us, saying he is encouraged by the increasing numbers of airlines flying into Kathmandu and the ones which are here

increasing their frequency.

LSG Sky Chefs has 35 percent of the world's market in flight catering and has 270 airline clients from more than 200 customer service centres in 48 countries. It produces more than 300 million airline meals a year and generated revenues of more than \$3.3 billion last year. Now that LSG has its production unit in Kathmandu, it says its pool of 600 chefs from all around the world will also have Nepali chefs.

Sharad Satyal of Soaltee's Inflight Catering says the Tilganga facility has high-tech equipment to ensure that every step of food processing is documented to ensure international quality standards. "There is a foolproof system to guarantee hygiene," he says.

Indeed, the meal centre took nine months of stringent tests by LSG's quality control technicians before the franchise license was approved. The facility has the country's only blast chiller, the largest bakery and the latest flight-catering equipment.

"From the moment an item is received in the building until the moment the finished product is loaded onto the aircraft, it is kept under carefully monitored hygiene and food safety conditions with strictly controlled temperatures," Satyal says. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The LSG team (from left): Sharad Satyal of Soaltee In-flight Catering, LSG Regional Director Michael Malchartzeck and Chef Govinda KC.

Nepali viewers have benefitted from competition among new tv channels

NARESH NEWAR

Nepal may have been one of the last countries in Asia to have its own television station, but it now has more channels than most other countries this size in the region.

Since the government loosened its regulations in 2001, the private sector has invested heavily in licenses and broadcast equipment. In addition to two state-owned channels (NTV and NTV Metro) there are Kantipur Television (KTV), Image Metro, Channel Nepal, and Nepal One uplinked from India. Two more terrestrial channels, Shangrila and Avenues are due to start up soon.

"It's a good thing that we have so much choice, but my concern is whether the investors can get their returns from such an expensive venture in such a crowded market," says Durga Nath Sharma, general manager of NTV.

More channels means more competition, and Sharma thinks that viewers will ultimately benefit. "The age of television monopoly is over," he says, hoping that the competition between the new players will be "healthy".

So far, the indications are that overall standards have improved. The stations are heavy on entertainment, but these are mostly Nepali-language drama and music. News and current affairs has been largely free of government control, making television an important source of visual news.

Says Sharma: "Our people are now thirsting for information and news rather than just entertainment. Times have changed and people will no longer sit in front of their sets just to listen to a minister's speech."

As in India, the advent of private channels has forced state media to be more creative and professional as well. NTV news is still heavy on government viewpoints on politics, but there is more freedom to report from the field and the studio talk shows are fair and balanced. "People can no longer question our professionalism," says NTV's chief editor, Rajendra Deb Acharya.

Responding to audience surveys that show a hunger for news, most private channels have balanced their entertainment content with news and current affairs. Channel Nepal and Nepal One compete with hourly news updates. Channel Nepal airs about six hours of news bulletins a day. KTV relies on its vast print news network to provide extensive nationwide coverage.

Both state and private channels also have programs that are getting big national followings. Among the highest-rated NTV programs are *Hijo Ajako Kura*, *Ankhi Jhyal*, *Bahas*, *Chintan Manan*, *Disanirdesh* and *Jagriti*. Kishore Nepal's *Mat Abhimat* has now got a wide

viewership all over the country.

KTV'S unique talk program, *It's My Show* allows experts from all sectors to run the program with their own studio guests. Interviewing well known Nepalis has become a favourite (and cheap) way to fill airtime and most channels now have versions of *Dishanirdesh*. Nepal One's *Nepal's Most Wanted*, patterned after a US program is drawing large numbers of viewers.

But within the stations, producers and owners complain of the lack of trained staff. Senior posts are handed over to print journalists with scant knowledge of the audiovisual medium. Most talk shows therefore resemble television versions of print interviews.

"It is not easy to run a television show and the cost production is

high," says filmmaker Mohan Mainali, "but television must fulfil its public service mandate by airing magazine programs with news features and short documentaries based on current affairs."

Mainali, who started the environmental documentary program, *Ankhi Jhyal*, says it is time for private channels to also venture outside the Valley. NTV's *Mat Abhimat* has huge ratings mainly because it's host Kishore Nepal crisscrosses the country allowing people to speak their minds without much interference.

However, it is in entertainment that Nepali channels have a lot of catching up to do. Generally, locally produced programs on current, relevant subject matter, like *Hijo Ajako Kura* touch the people and are hugely popular. The soaps, patterned after American and



KIRAN PANDAY

Indian formula plots, are less successful.

"There is nothing much to watch, we are repeating the same trend, which both the youngsters and adults have been watching on MTV and Indian channels for a long time," says former broadcaster, Suman Basnet.

There is one clear lesson from the

ratings surveys: as long as there are interesting, professional and relevant programs in Nepali, most Nepalis will flick their remotes away from Indian or foreign channels. Says tv journalist Rabintra Pandey: "We compete with the Indian channels, so we have to be different, especially during primetime." ●





The addition of new private television channels has resulted in a big increase in the sale of television sets nationwide

KHADGA SINGH

It is no longer a luxury item. Call it an information kit, or an idiot box, but the television set has become a utility like other home appliances. Television has become a necessity in urban Nepali homes.

The proliferation of new Nepali channels and the spread of cable have boosted domestic demand for tv sets, and distributors can't keep up with demand.

Even those from the lower middle class have joined the bandwagon, and they have a wide range of choices: from black and white and colour sets manufactured in Nepal to cheap imports from China—all under Rs 10,000.

Then there is the upper end of the market with flat tubes, LCD and plasma screens. There are installment-payment schemes, which means even the more expensive models are suddenly affordable. Add to that the exchange scheme under which you can trade in your old tv for a new

one and the choices are wide open.

Tv manufacturers and dealers know well how indispensable the gadget has become. They report more than 60,000 television sets sold last year alone, and this year it looks like sales will top 100,000. Major players in the television market have registered an annual growth of an unbelievable 50 percent in sales. Increasing purchasing capacity of consumers in the urban areas, expanding rural electrification and the spread of cable networks have translated into more and more buyers.

The latest rage seems to be flat-screen tvs. Almost all established brands have them, successfully increasing their number of consumers. With better picture and sound quality and the capacity to decode channels, flat screen TVs are in vogue. The good news for buyers is that the prices of flatrons are being slashed. "Since they are becoming more and more affordable for middle class consumers, many go for the flat

screens," says Saurabh Jyoti of Jyoti Group, which imports Philips sets from Singapore. To meet the soaring demand, his company has opened a brand new showroom in Kathmandu and started outlets in Pokhara and Birgunj.

Him Electronics sells Daewoo and Samsung sets and sees flat tvs as a value segment with bright growth potential. Its General Manager, Prabhakar Thapa, says 80 percent of the buyers go for ordinary colour tv but their tastes are changing: "Within one year, we expect to see that figure come down by half." The company manufactures nearly all its products in Nepal.

The price range varies from Rs 25-40,000 for 21 inch flat-screen sets of different brands. For rural Nepal, getting a conventional colour tv set is more than enough for now with prices that range from Rs 15-20,000. Dealers have seen that the government's policy of expanding electricity with the participation of the locals has resulted in greater demand for tv sets even in villages.

"We see many more rural people coming to buy tv sets these days," says Subash Saraugi of Distar, a Thai Company that has been selling 14 and 21-inch sets in Nepal. "Once the security situation improves, we are sure that there will be another big rise in sales."

Despite the growth and the potential, tv dealers and manufacturers face unhealthy



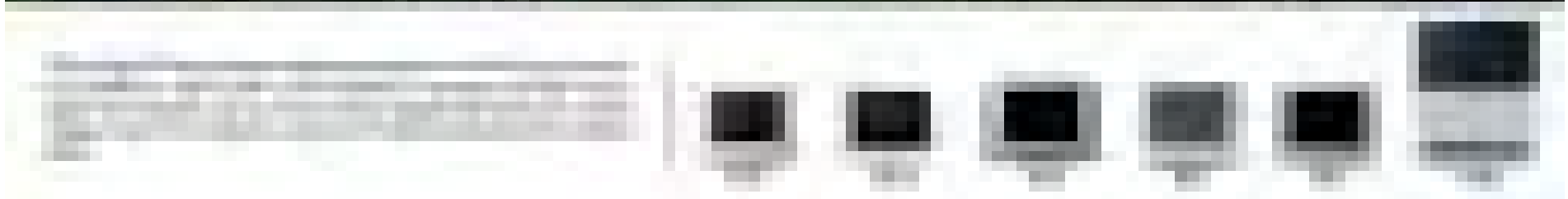
KIRAN PANDAY

competition due to smuggling and parallel import of tv sets. The smugglers can cut prices and sell their products without proper VAT bills and invoices. "Such sellers price the sets very low because they don't even pay customs duty, but we do and that adds up to 40 percent to the cost price," says Jyoti.

Most cheap products are now coming in from China. This has left some dealers and manufacturers worried. But some think this will

increase the size of the pie and ultimately the customers will go for better quality.

"The cheap brands are doing us a service by expanding the market," says Sarbjit S Anthak of Chaudhary Group which assembles the Korean GoldStar brand. "Once people start watching colour TV they won't stop and their next purchase will always be a better brand. That means our market is secured." ●



Mohan Baidya's arrest

Jana Astha, 31 March

आस्था

Because of his status in the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Mohan Baidya alias Kiran, was also given the responsibility of political commissar of the Maoists' People's Liberation Army Eastern Division. Although he was already in charge of the party's eastern central command he was not among the rebels who attacked Bhojpur on 2 March because of his age. The attack was made under the leadership of Commander and politburo member Barshaman Pun, alias Ananta.

Better known as the second senior most leader after Prachanda, Kiran is said to be the main ideologue and philosophical leader. He was the one to propose the concept of Prachandapath, the party's line, during the second national convention of the CPN (Maoist). He defined and explained Prachandapath, a concept that drew controversy in the communist movement of Nepal.



Before Prachanda had been chosen as the general secretary by the then Communist Party of Nepal (Masaal), Kiran held that post. The change of guard took place because of what was a 'sector scandal' dispute within the party 18 years ago. After the controversy, the party decided to demote all the leaders except Prachanda. That is how he got the promotion. Kiran was demoted to the position of politburo member. Prachanda was promoted.

Kiran was chosen as the party's general secretary after the party took disciplinary action against Mohan Bikram Singh who was ousted. It was then that the party split into two rival factions. Kiran was once a Nepali language teacher in a high school in Pyuthan district before his family later moved to Dang. He has three daughters and his wife is also said to have gone underground with him.

After the arrest of this senior Maoist leader, the rebels' morale has certainly dropped. The rebels were somewhat upbeat after their latest attacks in Beni and Bhojpur. In Maoist circles, there is talk that they may launch yet another fierce attack on a district headquarter. Chances are also equally high that they could take senior government officials hostage to pressurise the government to release their senior leaders.

Before Baidya, politburo member Matrika Prasad Yadab and central leader Suresh Ale Magar were arrested by Indian authorities and handed over to the government in western Nepal. Baidya, who had undergone a cataract operation just before his arrest in Siliguri, also suffers from asthma. He had been living in the same house in Siliguri for a while despite party workers suggesting he shift elsewhere.

The West Bengal state government was already apprehensive about the Maoist presence in the state because of the latter's increasing relations with the Kamatapuri Liberation Organisation, a banned political outfit in India.

What's more, the meeting between Maoist leaders and senior UML leaders some two years ago established Siliguri as a rebel shelter. It is believed that Indian security agencies were able to track Baidya down through his telephone. Similarly, Maoist leaders Yadab and Magar were also arrested last month after Indian security agencies tapped the phones.

Combat fatigue

Kantipur, 29 March

कान्तिपुर

Maoists in Rukum district are disheartened after watching their senior leaders being killed in the battle for Beni last month. A local teacher in the district said many rebels were having second thoughts about participating in raids like the one in Beni because of the high casualties. "They say they would not like to lose their lives anymore," the teacher said. "In fact, combat fatigue is setting in and many want peace." The frustration among the lower rank rebels became evident after a Maoist FM station confirmed that 50 fighters were killed in the Myagdi clash and one of the dead was Kal Bahadur Nath, vice commander of the western division. So far, he is the most high ranking rebel to have died in action. The radio also said the Maoists had captured 35 SLRs, three light machine guns, 14 shotguns, one two inch mortar and 65.303 rifles. But even this has not been able to arrest the sinking morale.

Fast to death

Hari Prasad Adhikari in Rajidhani, 31 March

राजधानी

Tekmath Rizal has fasted for as long as 27 days while he was jailed in Bhutan and this will be his fourth time to use this Gandhian tactic to put political pressure on the Bhutani regime. This time, he has given a 15-day ultimatum to the international community to step in and help solve his people's refugee crisis. He is prepared to fast unto death.

At Ratna Park, we can already see Rizal's health is deteriorating. He is a diabetic, has heart problems and is running a high fever. But he is determined to



continue his fast to put the message across to the world that Nepali-speaking Bhutanis have been ethnically-cleansed from their homeland.

India's involvement is critical in this, but New Delhi is playing a passive role. Rizal had no other way to get the attention of the Indian government but by this fast. So far it has not reacted at all to Rizal's fast. India can't remain aloof.

Rizal has already sent appeal letters to most world leaders calling their attention to the plight of his people. He also wants the Nepal government to facilitate the verification process, work actively with UNHCR and the Human Rights Council to repatriate the refugees and to internationalise the Bhutani refugee problem. He wants the international community to continue giving aid to the refugees and the UNHCR to continue playing an active role to manage the refugee camps.

If the international community, especially India, repeat their usual statement that this is a bilateral problem between Nepal and Bhutan, then Rizal's sacrifice will have been in vain. The refugees are being blamed by the Bhutani regime for the staged incident on 22 December which lead to the departure of the Joint Verification Team from the camps. Rizal believes that the refugees had

nothing to do with it, and are being victimised.

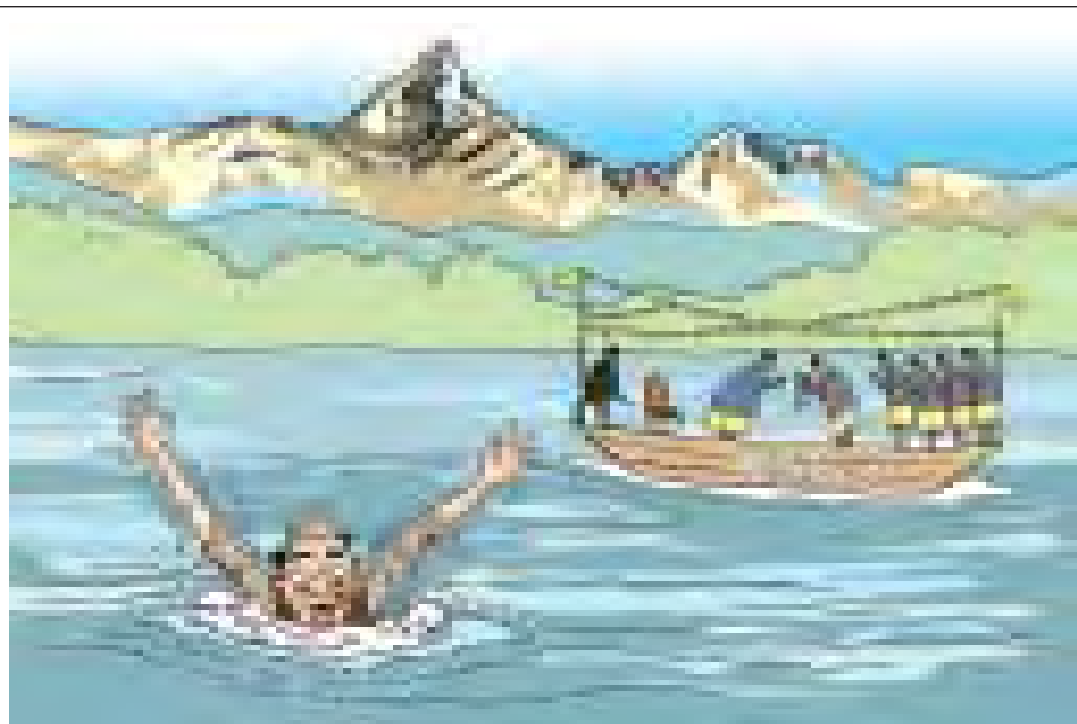
Beni's civilians

Nepal, 28 March-4 April

नेपाल

The government's intelligence failed again and it has become almost routine for the security forces to be unprepared for Maoist assaults. When the Maoists attacked Beni on Saturday night at 10PM, the security personnel were getting into their beds. After 12 hours, Beni was in ruins. The army's morale had already sunk when the government was not able to send reinforcements and ammunition while the battle was raging. By eight in the morning, DSP Ran Bahadur Gautam and 33 police were captured by the Maoists, who also ransacked all the ammunitions and guns from the police station. By nine, almost all the government offices had been destroyed. Besides burning papers and documents of local banks, the Maoists also looted a huge sum of money, the savings of many locals.

About 150 Nepalis lost their lives. Besides the Maoists and security forces, 30 civilians were killed and most of them from the air firing from the army helicopter. About seven labourers were killed in Jyanrukot. Laxmi Karki was hit when she was washing her dishes outside. Hemlal KC, a taxi driver had no idea that was going on and also got hit while he was driving in Bhagwati-2. In the fire set by the Maoists, two lodgers were killed in a hotel and the Maoists also shot dead an ordinary guard, Yogendra Gaur, of the DDC office. The Maoists also attacked their former cadres who had surrendered and taken refuge at the army post. "They asked us to join them again. When we refused, they started shooting and killed several others," says Chakrapani Acharya, who survived.



Boat: Felicitations for the king
Drowning man: Citizen

हिमाल Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 March-12 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"The Royal Nepali Army is no match for us in ground-level combat. The only advantage they have over us are their helicopter gunships recently supplied by India."

Mohan Baidya in an interview with the Calcutta Telegraph.

Fire season

Spacetime, 28 March

स्वेसटाइम दैनिक

The Charkose jungle along the tarai is bearing the brunt of forest fires this dry season. It's an annual affair, but this year the situation is more serious. In the stretch of forest between Patlaiya and Rautahat, millions of rupees worth of logs and forest have gone up in smoke. Smoke billowing from the jungles has even caused difficulties to residents in the area and the passengers traveling through the East-West Highway. Most of the 14,000 hectares of the forest coverage in Rautahat is now threatened, and the District Forest Office says it doesn't have the budget to fight the fire.

Villages in the forests are also threatened, and local people have to remain awake all night to stop the spreading flames. In the hills, the forests in the Rolwaling area of Dolakha have also been burning out of control for a week.

Forced recruitment

Spacetime, 29 March

स्वेसटाइम दैनिक

SALYAN—Since the breakdown of the second ceasefire, the Maoists claim that they have built a strong force of about 6,000 militia in Rolpa, Jajarkot, Rukum and Salyan districts. The figure maybe exaggerated, but the truth is that every household has been forced to send one family member to join the rebels. Under threat, villagers ranging from young children to elderly citizens and women are joining the Maoist army. They are forced to wear green uniforms, unlike the combat dress of the real Maoists, and are made to parade around the villages and shout revolutionary slogans. Last Saturday about 500 villagers and

Maoists were walking about flashing their guns, khukuris and swords at Mokhla Bazar, Sihanikhol, Daragaun and Dhorchaur villages. "I'm not sure how long I'll live," says an old man who, along with other villagers, was made to walk for months and not allowed to return home. He adds that the Maoists had promised them that they had to campaign in the villages for only ten days.

Night ambulance

Samacharpatra, March 28

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

JHAPA—Ambulances have stopped their night services after drivers were harassed and attacked last week. As a result, many sick people and emergency cases have been jeopardised. Dinesh Magar, a helper from the Birta Jaycees ambulance, was wounded when soldiers opened fire on him late at night when he was unable to stop his ambulance while rushing to the hospital. He is now in intensive care at BP Koirala Hospital. The next day, Bimal Nepal, another ambulance driver from Nepal Red Cross, was mugged and severely beaten by an unknown group. "We can't save others if we die," says Bishnu Subedi of Sashidhar Ambulance Service. "How can an ambulance racing at 80-100 km/hour halt at every checking point?" he asks.

Looking for dad

Kantipur, 28 March

कान्तिपुर

BHOJPUR—Englishman Kevin Benet has been looking for his Nepali father for the last 20 years. Every time he comes to Nepal, he hopes to find him, but in vain. His English mother,



Mary Benett, never wanted to talk about his Nepali father. But she told him everything after he found out through an aunt. His father, Surya Bahadur Rai, a former British Gurkha soldier, had met Mary in England when he was stationed there. The two married in 1962 and two years later Kevin was born, but when they were posted in different places they lost contact. Surya had sent Kevin a letter and his photograph. Mary had married again. One day, as she was looking at his photograph, and her husband tore it in rage. Kevin has sought help from the British Embassy and had managed to trace his father to Pokhara, but couldn't find him. Now after six years, he is in Nepal again, this time searching in Surya's home village of Chinamukhi in Bhojpur. Kevin, who has a heart condition, wasn't strong enough to walk there, but sent his Sherpa friend. Surya doesn't live there anymore. The good news was that he came back with photographs of Surya's new family and information they were living in Janakpur. Kevin is now sure he can trace his father in his next visit after having to rush to England for an operation.

"The king has been honest"

Rajeshwor Devkota in Saptahik Bimarsha, 26 March - 1 April

साप्ताहिक बिमर्शा

The king wishes to go to the people and meet them and the people are also interested to see their king. That is why the royal felicitations are taking place. This issue must not be politicised, and if the politicians do so they will stand to lose. In all the felicitations so far, we have seen spontaneous presence of big crowds of people. This has proved that people have great belief on monarchy. The royal move of 4 October was a compelling situation for the country and the people. It is true that the situation has become more complicated since then. But matters would have been worse if the king had not taken over. The political parties of the parliament must take the responsibility of whatever has happened in the country after 4 October. It was the incapability of the Parliament that paved way for the royal move of 4 October and the enactment of the article 127 of the constitution. The parties were not capable of handling state power when they were in government, and neither have they been able to cooperate with the king to form the alliance. Many say that there is a tripartite conflict in the country. Actually the conflict is just between those who support the constitution and those who oppose it. The rebels are underground. The king has been honestly protecting the constitution. He has not violated any of its provisions. Elections are essential but if anyone says that they can be held under the present circumstances, they are lying. The polls are something they are using as a play to stick to the state-power.



Just saying it won't do, they will have prove through deeds that elections can indeed take place in the present situation. For elections to take place, the political parties will have to be taken into confidence. Those in the power must have the guts to give up power to get the support of the parties. The current political deadlock will end only when the present government goes. On the other hand, the parties must give up their street protests and come for dialogue and agreement.

It is essential to bring the Maoists to the table as well. But, even if they don't come for peace talks, the state must run. At present, neither has the government has been able to build the trust with the rebels for talks, nor have the latter proved their trustworthiness. Therefore, there is no possibility for talks at the moment. If the rebels still come forward with their demand for constituent assembly, there is no point on holding talks.

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Polluters pay ... or they should

RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

If the Indian government carries out a threat to disconnect electricity and water supplies to 16,500 polluting industrial units in Delhi, it will be the first major attempt to enforce the "polluter pays principle" in the country.

Delhi's Commissioner of Industries Jalaj Srivastav insists that the industries cough up 50 percent of the estimated \$640 million it will cost to set up 15 common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) in Delhi state. The industries are bound to pay up under the CETP Act of 2000, but claim that they were not consulted on the costs or design of the plants.

"The CETP Act gives a key role to the participating industries but we are being kept in the dark while the government goes on building the effluent treatment plants which are nothing but white elephants," says SK Tandon, general secretary of the Confederation of Delhi Industries.

Srivastav disagrees with that interpretation and said that work on constructing the CETPs had begun even before the act came into being in November 2000. "It was therefore impossible to involve the industries in the awarding of the contracts," he said.

While the dispute continues over who picks up the tab for effluent treatment and how much of it, environmentalists warn of the continuing deterioration of the environment around New Delhi, home to 14 million people.

Last year, the environmental group Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) proved that groundwater contaminated with pesticides and toxic effluents was finding its way into bottled 'mineral' water and into colas marketed by big brand names such as Pepsi and Coca-Cola.

Studies conducted by various government agencies have shown that unacceptably high levels of industrial effluents are seeping into groundwater aquifers or end up in the waters of the snow-fed Yamuna river, which flows through the capital.

Environmentalist R K Pachauri, chairman of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, believes that in all probability, no river of greater purity has been damaged to a greater extent by a small group of people.

Pachauri is among those who have been calling for efforts to restore the Yamuna to its pristine glory through special campaigns that include better pollution control regimes. However, these have been thwarted by the industrialists' lobby.

The first real breakthrough came in May 2000, when the Supreme Court stepped in to ban factories from discharging untreated industrial effluents into the Yamuna river. It based its order on alarming reports from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). But the implementation of the court's order and the CETP Act that followed has been difficult, not least because it threatened unemployment for thousands of workers and brought financial losses to the owners of industrial units.

The 20-kilometre stretch of the Yamuna within Delhi state accounts for at least 70 percent of the pollution in its waters, the CPCB said in its reports. These also point to thousands of small engineering units, textile industries, detergent makers and auto component factories that pollute the river.

Delhi, which was originally intended to be the country's administrative centre, turned into an industrial one because of easy access to the dispensers of licences in the bureaucracy.

But the haphazard growth that resulted quickly turned many of its areas into a hellish nightmare of polluting factories that include electroplating units, battery recyclers and leather tanneries – all draining their effluents through makeshift drains into the Yamuna.

Environmentalist M C Mehta, who moved the Supreme Court to take action through public-interest litigation, has blamed the mess on "corrupt officials who have violated every environmental law".

Mehta pointed out that many of the units—actually illegal—resorted to stealing electricity and avoiding taxes in order to make profits. But the government has been loathe to shut them down for fear of increasing unemployment.

Industrial and domestic pollution has been steadily choking India's lakes, rivers, estuaries and groundwater sources. Surveys conducted by the CPCB as early as 10 years ago showed that aquifers across India had become contaminated with industrial effluents and pesticides. ● (IPS)

Malaya & Ceylon

What the Sri Lankans could learn from the Malayan insurgency

Sri Lanka's bitter war of terror—one that practically invented the infamy of the suicide bomber—had been showing signs of abating of late. But a bitter power struggle between Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and a schism among the rebel Tamil tigers, now

COMMENT
Wang Gungwu



threatens to reignite the violence. Their political duel was aggravated recently when the president, wary that her prime ministerial rival was "too soft" in dealing with the rebel Tamil Tigers, sacked three ministers and took over their portfolios. Now she has dissolved parliament and set new elections for April, three years before they are due.

Having lived through the Malayan war of 1947-1960, I often wonder why Sri Lanka's war has been so much more difficult to end. On the surface, much about those two wars seem similar. In Malaya, ethnic Chinese fought British and Malay regiments and police, which is roughly comparable to the Tamils' fight against the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. Like the Tamil Tigers, the Malayan Communists were also damned as terrorists, but the casualties they inflicted were small compared to the mass killings caused by both sides in Sri Lanka's war.

Back then, Malaysia's ethnic tensions produced communal riots in which both Chinese and Malays were killed. These, however, were never allowed to degenerate into the outright communal slaughter that the war in Sri Lanka has often produced.

Could Sri Lanka have learned anything from the Malayan experience? Could the Malayan military strategy to contain the rebellion have been imported? British experts from the Malayan emergency tried to help the Americans in Vietnam—obviously without success. Of course, one reason for that failure is that the South Vietnamese were not different enough from the North Vietnamese for the Malayan

formula of identifying and isolating rebel communities by race to work. But Sri Lanka's war, with its ethnic origins, is closer to the Malayan experience and so this strategy could, perhaps, have been tested.

A second similarity comes from the fact that the British were the imperial power in both countries. At independence, national leaders in both countries inherited similar sets of laws and administrative practices. Indeed, at the time Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) achieved independence, it was far more committed to democracy and the common-law legal system than Malaya.

So why did multi-communal politics ultimately work in Malaya, and then in both Malaysia and Singapore, and fail so badly in Ceylon? One key reason must be the historical experience of the Sinhalese. For two thousand years, they had to defend themselves against attacks by expansionist Tamil kingdoms from the Indian mainland. As I travelled around the island admiring its ancient capitals, notably the ones sacked by Tamil kings, and Buddhist shrines set up to counter the impact of Hinduism, I began to understand the traumas endured by the Sinhalese. Sadly, the Tamils now living in the Jaffna districts in the northern and eastern parts of the island are probably descended from Tamils who were also victims of the same external attacks.

Another factor arose from the fact that Tamils, on the whole, had been open to a succession of Portuguese, Dutch, and British administrations from the 16th century onwards, while most Sinhalese lived under their own king in the Kandyan kingdom until the 19th century. In particular, the Buddhist priests, who are the guardians of the faith and have wielded much influence in Sri Lanka politics since the mid-1950s, were the least touched by foreign rule. They are determined to limit Hindu Tamil power in Sri Lankan affairs and encourage the country's leaders to make few concessions to Tamil autonomy.

Furthermore, the degree of

rigidity in inter-ethnic negotiations since the rise to power of the Bandaranaike family (of which the current President is a member) was accompanied by a series of ideological struggles among Sinhalese politicians, not least those led by various socialist and communist parties. This ongoing disunity among the Sinhalese contributed to making Sri Lanka's governments much more fragile than those that succeeded the British in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

What was decisively different between Ceylon and Malaya, however, is found in the fact that, in Ceylon, both major communities consider themselves to be natives, having both lived on the land they hold for over twenty centuries.

In contrast, the Malay Peninsula, including the island of Singapore, was the land of the Malays (Tanah Melayu) before the first Chinese and Indian immigrants came and settled there. The British, who did not depose the Malay rulers as they did the Sinhalese king in Kandy, made sure that the native position of the Malays was constitutionally secure from the start.

Once the Chinese recognised their place as newcomers, they had to accept that becoming full nationals of the new nation state was a status that needed to be earned. Although most Chinese in Malaysia now feel that they deserve the full rights of citizenship, they have not insisted on absolute equality. In any case, they never claim to be indigenous to any particular locale, not even in Singapore, where ethnic Chinese make up three-quarters of the population.

Sri Lanka's tragedy reminds us how many things can go wrong when old Asian polities seek to establish modern nation states. It becomes even more difficult when the complex historical baggage calls for sensitivity and tolerance while the protagonists are determined to see every concession as surrender.

● (Project Syndicate)

Wang Gungwu is Director of the East Asian Institute, University of Singapore.





Five reasons why America's political power is slipping

With the first anniversary of the war in Iraq, America's reputation continues to sink. After trying to bully the world into supporting an unprovoked war a year ago, the US

COMMENT
Jeffrey D Sachs



and its allies have been proved either fools or liars. But this has not stopped the US's thuggish behavior.

The US could be a great force for good. With an \$11 trillion annual national income, America could finance the control of AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other

killer diseases for a small fraction of the money it wastes in Iraq. Instead, US aid to the world's poor as a share of national income is the lowest of any donor country.

The US can also be a force for great ill. America's current military budget of about \$450 billion, is roughly equal to the rest of the world's combined military spending. The Bush Administration believes that US military power buys security, even though terrorism has increased since the Iraq War.

But despite its wealth and military might, America's ability to project political power—for good or ill—will decline in future years,

for at least five reasons:

- **America's budget is in crisis.** Thanks to Bush's tax cuts and \$150 billion increase in military spending, contributing to budget deficits of \$500 billion per year, the US will have to raise taxes and limit budget spending, whether or not Bush is re-elected.
- **The US is borrowing massively from abroad.** Japan alone has foreign exchange reserves of around \$750 billion, mostly in US treasury bills. China, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan together have another \$1.1 trillion in foreign exchange reserves. The US is in deep and growing debt to Asia. Only

The decline of America

massive buying of treasury bills by Asian central banks has prevented the dollar from falling even more precipitously than it has.

- **The rest of the world is catching up.** America's big technological lead will narrow relative to Brazil, China, India and other major developing economic regions. China will have an economy larger than the US economy within 25 years. Although considerably poorer on average than China, by 2050, India will conceivably have an economy the size of America's.
- **A narrower economic gap will reduce America's relative geopolitical power.** China and India, which together account for about 40 percent of the world's population, will begin to play much larger roles on the world scene. The current xenophobic reactions to "outsourcing" of jobs to India's software engineers reflects the underlying anxiety of a US population that wants to stay in the economic lead. With or without America, Asia's technological capacities and incomes will grow. Prosperity will be more widely spread, even if America's

ego gets hurt in the process.

- **Demographics will weaken America's militaristic approach to the world.** Much of Bush's support comes from white fundamentalist Christian men. This, in my opinion, is a social group that is fighting a rearguard battle against the growing power of women, immigrants and other religions. The religious right's backward-looking agenda is doomed. The US Census Bureau recently found that by 2050, the US population will be 24 percent Hispanic, 14 percent African-American and 8 percent Asian.

In the face of these factors, the US right-wingers dream of a global empire will most likely fade. This may happen sooner rather than later if Bush loses this November in an election that is certain to be very close. But whatever the outcome, the US cannot postpone forever its inevitable decline relative to the rest of the world. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D. Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

TB megacrisis

GUSTAVO CAPDEVILA in GENEVA

World Tuberculosis Day found the scientific community divided on the status of the disease: the optimism of the World Health Organisation (WHO) contrasts with the gloomy forecasts of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) or Doctors Without Borders. Meanwhile, every year nearly nine million people are infected with TB, and the disease kills around two million more.

WHO's global TB report says there has been progress in the number of patients diagnosed and treated through DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment, Short-Course), a strategy launched a decade ago. But the non-governmental MSF says, "We are losing the battle against tuberculosis because we rely on archaic diagnostic tests and drugs."

The independent Paris-based group, which demands greater investment in TB research and development of medicines, noted that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has magnified the tuberculosis problem. The weakening of the immune system that accompanies AIDS creates fertile ground for TB infection.

Research is under way for new medications and diagnostic methods that are intended to improve control of the infection, said epidemiologist Catherine Watt, of the WHO's tuberculosis division. However Olivier Brouant, head of the MSF tuberculosis mission in India, said that the best TB drugs were developed during 1940 to 1960. According to MSF, pharmaceutical companies are conducting research and development related to TB, but have generally cut their investments in investigation of antibacterial treatments.

The drug industry "cannot be relied on to bring a new TB drug to a market that mainly consists of people with very little purchasing power," adds the organisation.

The number of reported infections grew much more quickly in African countries with a high prevalence of HIV, said WHO's Brian Williams, who also stressed that the main problem is that the shortest treatment for the disease is a six-month program and it is difficult to convince people to take a medication for such a long period.

The United Nations health agency underscored the rapid expansion of the DOTS method. Some three million people receive DOTS today—an increase of more than a million in the past two years, and is claimed to be one of the major public health successes of the past decade.

The WHO's goal for 2005 is to detect 70 percent of all TB cases and to cure 85 percent of those. It calculated that in order to meet its objectives for detection and treatment in the 22 "high burden" countries, except Russia, it will need to spend \$950 million in 2004. The budget for 2005 would be 1.1 billion dollars compared to 2003's \$850 million. ●





“Well done, Pun”

In his oral testimony, Tul Bahadur Pun recounts how he was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in the battle for Mogaung in Burma in June 1944. Pun single handedly fought off dozens of Japanese defenders, even while the rest of his platoon was wiped out. This and other testimonies of living Gurkha soldiers are taken from *Lahurey ka Katha* by Dev Bahadur Thapa, published by Himal books, and translated for *Nepali Times* in this space every week.



I was pulling out my gun again when our commanding officer, a short man, appeared and said, “Well done, Pun”. He asked if I was all right, and I replied that everything was not all right. I told him that there were quite a lot of enemies inside the trench.

He promised to send the flame-thrower, then vanished. On the lower side there was a British regiment which sent a flame-thrower. The flame even keeps burning on water, and if it falls on stone or iron it just turns them into soil. This weapon is best for trench warfare. The fire is so dangerous that if it falls on cloth or a piece of flesh, it just sticks to the skin.

Many enemies were roasted alive. Others fled through the passage that we had kept open. However, they didn't get far. Most only took a few steps and then fell down. The enemy troops were wiped out and we entered the town.

There we saw that the enemy troops and our own men in hand-to-hand combat, making it impossible to fire powerful weapons. Some of the soldiers started firing, while others began fighting with their hands like people under the influence of alcohol and a few were buried under stones and bricks. A few were struck with sticks or rifle butts. There was a sense of the confusion one sees during a festival.

This was followed by the harsh sound of a whistle blown by their commander. They stopped fighting and ran away. A whole lot of soldiers who had been taking shelter in the town started escaping by jumping into the river. The water carried about half of them away, but the rest managed to reach the other side. For a while the whole river was covered with human bodies. The civilians had already abandoned the town, and following the flight of the enemy soldiers, we captured the town.

In the evening we had an assembly, when respective commanders discussed strategies for the next day and also assessed who had fought well and which tactics had worked. Reports were collected on who did best in that day's capture of the town. Our platoon sergeant reported that except for two men, the rest of our platoon had been killed. He mentioned my name, and told them that I had done excellently during the siege of the bridge and also mentioned that I was the first to get into the enemy camp. The commander added that he was present at the time and had seen the event with his own eyes. A strong recommendation letter was written and dispatched to the war office.

On one day I had been assigned to bring the rations, which were carried by mules. When I arrived at the headquarters, a message had arrived from the war office. The clerk on duty took me aside and said, “Pun, one of the soldiers from your company has done an excellent job. I have collected the message. In all probability he will get a gallantry award.” He gave me the message and told me to give it to the company. I glanced at it, and saw my name on it.

The following day, the commander sent for me. I saluted him, and then he patted me on the back and told me he had received the reply to his letter. “Well done!” he said, “You will receive a gallantry award, but I can't say right now what class of award it will be. Probably you will receive a very high order gallantry award.” At the time, I was an ordinary rifleman. He told me that I had been elevated to the rank of sergeant and asked me to collect soldiers and form a section.

Our assault on the town had taken place on 23 June, 1944. I was awarded the Victoria Cross for our assault on the town that day. Captain Elmond also got a Victoria Cross. A few months later, I received the gallantry award in Delhi from Lord Louis Mountbatten, who was the viceroy of India and the supreme commander of the allied forces in Asia at the time.

The day after the fighting, the camp was cleaned and an inquiry of how many were killed in the assault took place. The attack on the town had cost us the lives of 11 British officers, 17 Gurkha officers and 773 others below the rank of jamadar (Gurkha lieutenant). After this, we reassembled at Dehara Dun and then went home on a two-month paid leave. ●

Winrock International Putting Ideas to Work

Announcement for travel and field research grants : Summer Session 2004

Winrock International, Nepal, is pleased to assist promising young Nepalese scholars by providing them with partial research and travel grants. The research grant is for students to carry out field research related to Masters/PhD degree whereas the travel grant is for researchers to present research papers at international conferences. **The grant program will exclusively cover aspects of equity and environmental justice in the management of natural resources.** Therefore, applications for both types of grants, should clearly state how the outcome of the research contributes to the enhancement of socio-economic equity and how it benefits the disadvantaged and marginalized groups of people in the society. Acknowledging the particular importance of women professionals in promoting sustainability in the natural resource management sector, 50 % of the total number of grants i.e. both travel and research, will be allocated to women candidates.

CONDITIONS FOR THE GRANTS:

A) Eligibility: Applicants, who have completed their Bachelor's degree and are actively engaged in research or in a graduate academic program in natural resource management fields viz. land, water, energy, environment, forest etc., are eligible to apply. Research proposals as well as conference papers must have adopted social science research methodology rather than natural science or technical research. The conference paper may or may not be field based, however, must have focused equity concept.

B) Types and amount of grants: In order to support as many scholars as possible with a limited amount of funds, the program is strictly confined to the partial support only. The maximum support for Ph.D. and Master research will be 60,000 and 40,000 Nepali Rupees, respectively. In the case of Travel Grant, the amount will be up to 50,000 Rupees. However, in all cases, priority will be given to the cost effective applications.

C) Announcement of award winner: The research grants applicant will be informed (by telephone, email or post) about the status of his/her application within 4 weeks of the last date of submission of applications. However, in the case of Travel grants, evaluation of the applications will be made every month. The applications for Summer Session research grants should reach Winrock by May 31, 2004. The applications for travel grants for the same period should reach Winrock by September 30, 2004.

Note: Electronic application including the proposal/paper is also acceptable. Please contact Winrock International for the grants application form and other detailed information or download from website - www.winrock.org.np

Applications should be mailed to:
Application for Research/Travel grant
Winrock International, P. O. Box 1312
Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 4467087, 4472839
madhikary@winrock.org.np

Golf ecology

Taking account of environmental sensitivities

Amongst the top attractions of playing golf is the environment a golf course provides.

One could safely say that a majority of golfers live in cities, and that getting away to large, beautifully landscaped havens of trees and grassy expanses provides a respite from the daily barrage of pollution, noise and unnatural visual stimuli of a city's concrete jungle. Those who do not partake in this sport would find similar solace in public or protected natural parks, or areas less touched by the urban sprawl.

TEE BREAK Deepak Acharya



In Nepal, protecting forests and natural areas is a hard battle. There is indiscriminate cutting of trees, both in and out of our cities, and the upkeep of public parks proves difficult due to limited interest or budgets.

An average 18-hole golf course occupies between 100 to 140 acres of land (800-1,100 ropanis). Within or near cities, this is a significant area: this land could have been used for housing, industry, buildings, parks and farming. So what is the trade off to the ecology of the environment and the use of land in creating a golf course?

Even though I am not an environmentalist, I thought it would be interesting to lay down some thoughts. Golf courses built recently are usually constructed on farm, waste or zoned land that requires green-belt areas, and less often on uninhabited land or within preserved areas that require ecological care through consideration of environmentally sensitive parts.

With any development of land, or land use, there is a change from what used to be to what will be. Much of the farmland in Nepal used to be forest. In fact most of Kathmandu Valley outside the centers of the three main cities used to be forested till not so long ago.

Today, if one were to build a new golf course in the Valley within easy reach, it would almost necessarily have to be on farmland. What changes would occur should this happen? A handful of farmers would sell their property, and either use that money to move elsewhere outside the Valley, or perhaps invest it in some other property and trade. The land would then be developed into a green area for sports recreation use and as a tourist attraction.

If any trees on the land being developed were cut down, these would, or should be replaced by planting many more new ones elsewhere within the area. Forested high-lying areas if any, are usually where wildlife would reside, and should be handled with care. If more trees are planted than were there before, this would enhance the environment and provide a sanctuary to wildlife and some of Nepal's many birds.

Water would be needed to maintain the grass, and this would be tapped in ways similar to what farmers use now, perhaps drawing on bore wells during the drier seasons. Having a lot of porous surface, unlike built up areas, roads and paths, the water used would get a chance to replenish the ground water table. Additionally, areas where erosion of soil could take place due to earth movement during landscaping would have to be taken into account.

The top qualities of grass needed would entail application of fertiliser, pesticide, and fungicides. As with all applications of chemicals, including those used for farming, if used carefully and in moderation, the effect on the environment would be a lot less adverse than say textile dyeing units pumping untreated chemical waste into our rivers or toxic emissions from our adulterated-petrol consuming vehicles and brick kilns. Speaking of which, have you wondered which is a better use of land close to populated areas—a lush green self-sustaining golf course with trees and grass or a brick factory?

There are pros and cons everything. All of us in the world today live at the cost of nature, and knowingly or unknowingly affect the environment and the ecology everyday in almost everything we do, from farming to consuming water, driving our vehicles to using anything dependent on electricity, whether it is produced through burning fossil fuel or through dams constructed to produce hydroelectric power.

Time to lay these thoughts aside and enjoy the lush green fairways, beautiful surroundings and an enjoyable round of golf. ●

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

Win-win series

Sports beats politics in making peace headway between India and Pakistan

MUSHAHID HUSSAIN in ISLAMABAD

The recently concluded cricket series of one-day matches between Pakistan and the visitors from India brought out the best that Pakistanis as a people can offer, while the gripping series was a test of the teams' spirit, skill and strength.

On 24 March India beat Pakistan in a thrilling final of the one-day series of five matches between the two arch rivals played this month. On Sunday, the two cricketing nations began the first of the three test matches they will play in Pakistan. Each test match lasts for five days.

The cricket series is the first being played out in Pakistan as part of confidence-building measures after nearly 14 years when armed militancy in Kashmir first surfaced. Pakistan came to India for a test series in 1999 and the two countries have met in venues as such as Sharjah, but the Indian government has until now held to its position of not sending its cricket team to a country it accused of waging a 'proxy war' in Kashmir.

So, like any competition between two traditional rivals India and Pakistan, which have been locked in an adversarial relationship for the last 57 years, this was no ordinary clash. It was a test of their maturity to compete by demonstrating grace in victory, and dignity in defeat. Cricket can be a plus to promote a country's image, as it did in Pakistan's case, since a cross-section of the Indian elite visiting Pakistan was bewildered and literally bowled over by the sporting behaviour of the Pakistani people.

The Pakistani spirit was on display with a warm hospitality and welcoming spontaneity manifesting the essence of what is, at the core, the good-natured, large-hearted Pakistani ethos. Newspaper reports gushed over how Pakistani taxi drivers turned down cab fares from visiting Indians, and how Indians, making use of easier movement between the two countries of late, were able to visit neighbouring Pakistan—many for the first time.

Many thought the idea of a cricket series was a gamble given recent conflicts and mutual suspicions. But these cricket matches brought out the best among the Pakistani people, even though the cricket team lost the series by a close margin.

Sometimes, sports can also bring out the worst among players, proving that acrimony and conflict

is not the monopoly of a battlefield alone. In July 1969, El Salvador and Honduras even fought a week-long 'football war' with over 2,000 casualties after a three-match series of matches between the two neighbours degenerated into a free-for-all. Or take the 1972 Munich Olympics, where the field-hockey final between Pakistan and West

either on class, ethnic or sectarian lines. Second, cricket is a major factor for national unity, providing a sense of participation to all parts of the country. Not since Pakistan's World Cup triumph in 1992 was the entire nation so riveted by cricket, as was the case in the recent series with India.

Third, in a country where merit is almost always subordinate to the 'sifarshi culture' based on contacts, cricket is one field where an opportunity for social mobility is provided based on excellence and performance.

Like any sporting event, there are critics, and, in this case, even conspiracy theorists, where the loser's logic prevails. A loss has to be due to a conspiracy, implying as if the match was 'fixed', similar to a losing politician's cribbing where an election defeat is invariably attributed to 'rigging'.

There is also an element of denial, is if a defeat is something outside the realm of probability. To this day, many in Pakistan attribute the 1971 debacle—the separation of Bangladesh—to an 'international conspiracy', conveniently forgetting Pakistan's own mistakes accumulated over time that resulted in the Bengalis' alienation.

Pakistan's cricket team certainly needs to imbibe lessons starting, first and foremost, from a 'killer instinct' fired by the will to win at all costs. This has to be a three-in-one exercise: combat defeatism, foster determination and promote discipline. ● (IPS)

Germany turned sour, with Pakistan's defeat becoming a near diplomatic disaster. Behaving as sore losers, 13 of its hockey players were debarred for a year for misbehaviour and Pakistan later apologised to West Germany for this appalling lack of sportsmanship.

Cricket, as the Pakistan-India series manifested, has certain unique pluses for Pakistanis. Three are noteworthy. First, cricket straddles the divisions in Pakistani society,

Mushahid Hussain was information minister of Pakistan under Nawaz Sharif, and is currently a member of the senate.



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Paintings by Asha Dangol** until 4 April Gallery Moksh. Closed Monday
- ❖ **Paintings by Sarita Dangol** until 9 April Gallery 9 Lazimpat 4428694
- ❖ **Mixed Media exhibition** by Pilaiporn June Pethrith Lisborg, until 10 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery 4218048
- ❖ **Sculpture by Nicolas Rougier** until 10 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery at 1PM
- ❖ **Glimpses of Kathmandu City** Paintings by Uma Shanker Shah until 12 April at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353



EVENTS

- ❖ **Public hearing** organised by the Blue Diamond Society. 2 April at the BICC Nuptse Hall, Baneshwor, 10AM-1PM followed by a pride march from New Baneshwor to Maiti Ghar
- ❖ **Training for change** 2-4:30 PM, 8 April at Moksh, Pulchowk.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** with Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band every Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel 4412999
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** Dwarika's Friday 7PM onwards 4479488

FOOD

- ❖ **Live cooking counter** Cooking classes at Shangri-la Hotel 4412999
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** BBQ lunch with live music Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza every Saturday and Sunday. Rs 650 per person 4273999
- ❖ **The Beer Garden at Vaijayantha** Chilled beer and snacks Saturday and Sunday 11AM-5PM at the Godavari Village Resort, Taukhel. 5560675
- ❖ **Café U** in Sanepa, Patan, opposite British School is now serving dinner every Friday and Saturday night. 5523263
- ❖ **Bring your wine** along every Thursday and Sunday Himalatte Café
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for speciality coffees. Opp St Mary's School, 5521755
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, 4431632
- ❖ **Free Irish Coffee** with main course. K-too! Beer & Steakhouse 4433043

GETAWAYS


- ❖ **Escape to Godavari** on a special halfboard package for Nepalis and expatriates at the Godavari Village Resort, Taukhel. 5560675
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** Award winning Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500 TMPL Reservations or reservations@tigermountain.com
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BOOKWORM

Nepal Orchids in Pictures *René de Milleville and Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha*
Malla Prakashan, 2004
Rs 999


An extensive guide to 140 indigenous species and varieties of orchids in Nepal, including information on the blooming seasons of each and the altitudes and temperatures that they can be found at. While the tables and details may appeal more to botanists and conservationists, the some 250 colour photographs of these beautiful flowers that follow are enough to enchant even the most casual of floral fanciers.

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



JAI NEPAL CINEMA

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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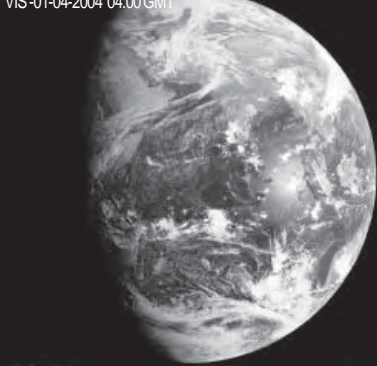
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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

VIS-01-04-2004 04:00 GMT



The numbers of forest fires on the Valley rim are indications of how dry this season has been. When meteorology doesn't help, we have to turn to the rain gods and that is what people are hoping for at the pulling of the Machendranath. Looking at this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning, it looks like Nepal is caught between a low pressure system over northeast India and a massive front stretching all the way from Africa across the Arabian Sea. What this means is an infusion of moisture and, with rising temperatures, it will lead to convection systems over the Himalaya over the weekend bringing storms and sporadic rain, mainly in northwestern Nepal. Expect temperatures to climb next week as the haze thins and the sunshine is more direct.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Day	Weather	Temp
Fri	Cloudy	26-11
Sat	Sunny	28-11
Sun	Sunny	28-10
Mon	Sunny	29-11
Tue	Sunny	30-12

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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Hits 91.2 What you burn is what you breathe.

Kathmandu's air quality deteriorated further last week as the average PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) concentration in the Valley increased by 7 percent, in addition to the 17 percent increase we experienced last week. This clearly indicates that air pollution in the Valley remains at unhealthy levels. The increase is most significant along Putali Sadak where the average PM10 level increased during the previous week by 18 percent. The air quality was especially bad during the later part of the week when the pollution levels along busy roads were more than three times the national standards (120 micrograms per cubic meter). PM10 are fine particles in the air that can damage the respiratory system as well as the cardiovascular system.

21 - 27 March in micrograms per cubic meter. Source: www.mope.gov.np

Location	PM10 Level (µg/m³)
Putalisadak	318
Patan H	300
Thamel	248
TU	186
Bhaktapur Matsyagaun	227
	111

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