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JOYRIDE

Can Deuba keep the car on the road?

KUNDA DIXIT

Everyone in the new Deuba government agrees on the need to restore peace and hold elections, they just don't agree on how to go about it. Some want a unilateral ceasefire to pressure the Maoists to come to the negotiating table, others say it won't work.

Peace activists have been lobbying for a ceasefire, even if talks are not possible. They say this would allow the government to address the urgent development and rehabilitation needs of the people.

Prime Minister Deuba has to accommodate a divergence of views and vested interests among the four parties and royal nominees in his coalition. It is clear that on security matters, he needs the army's nod. One party insider told us: "We have ministers who will all be on mobiles reporting back to their bosses. It's going to be tricky."

The cabinet's first real test is next week's budget. Already, there are signs that the UML and Deuba's NC-D are pulling in different directions. The UML's deputy prime minister and finance minister, Bharat Mohan Adhikary, says he wants to unveil a "peace budget" that will take money down to local communities to revive delivery of government services.

He told us: "We will use the budget for confidence-building and channel it through grassroot groups even if they have Maoists in them."

Adhikary sees it as a way to get around Maoist objections, and perhaps even a way to bring the rebels to the negotiating table.

But such a move is sure to be opposed by the army. One close Deuba aide told us: "It's not going to happen. We don't want money to reach the Maoists." The prime minister prefers an all-party presence in local bodies so that the budget can be spent on development, he said.

However, there are questions about whether village councils can function at a time when the Maoists have been assassinating mayors and ward chairmen even in the streets of the capital.

The problem is not a lack of money. Only 30 percent of last year's development budget was spent. The World Bank's \$15 million Poverty Alleviation Fund is lying idle. There is clearly a need for a decisive prime minister not just to steer the government in one direction, but also to have a destination to drive towards.

● (With reporting by Navin Singh Khadka)



SUBHAS RAI

Timesnepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 144

Q. Is there still a rationale for the anti-king street demonstrations?

Yes 38.2%

No 58.8%

Don't know 2.8%

Total votes:948

Weekly Internet Poll # 145. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the government declare a unilateral ceasefire?

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

For over two years King Gyanendra tried to be an activist monarch who wanted to be seen as well as heard. He felt the political parties with their infighting and corruption had taken the country to the brink, and he came to the rescue.

He fired Sher Bahadur Deuba and took over, appointing two Panchayat era prime ministers from parties without numerical standing in the dissolved House. There were indications the royal palace wanted to play an active role in governance through rule by ordinance, say in appointments and budgetary exercises.



However, the ground reality had changed so much since 2002 that King Gyanendra last month had to bring back the man he sacked. He may have waited too long, tried to manipulate nominees, but it took statesmanship to swallow pride and bring Deuba back. It has taken the prime minister a month to convince the UML and others to join a multi-pronged interim government by dangling choice positions. This may not be an ideal set-up, and not a complete correction of October Fourth, but the nature and composition of the Deuba team is sufficiently different from his two predecessors for us to give it the benefit of doubt.

Let's not start wrecking its chances before the cabinet even begins work. The party stalwarts, we notice, are hedging their bets (and maybe their reputations) by

sending their trusted pals to government. But hadn't we been saying all along that the elder statesmen should make way for the young turks? The only octogenarian who refuses let go and travels to Delhi to make momentous pronouncements is Girija Prasad Koirala. Being the wily politician he is, Koirala seems to be trying to buy insurance from the Maoists in case a government made up of two of his staunchest rivals actually starts organising local and national elections.

Indeed, while there are those who read the surfacial press and fret for the future of the Nepali monarchy, we are in no such misapprehension. The monarchy, as a historical institution, is here to stay provided it takes a lesson from the past 12 years that the Nepali people have learnt to speak, have a voice and will not give it up. Indeed, the king may already have realised the advantage of leaving politics to politicians. Kingship will be both comfortable and rewarding in a constitutional throne.

We wish King Gyanendra a happy birthday, and a long reign that brings prosperity to his people.

Disappeared rights

We are trapped between the cultures of fear and impunity

That Nepal now tops the world in the number of 'disappeared' is old news. Or so it appears, given the lack of news, analysis and most importantly, outrage.

Yet, this is not so surprising. We are caught in the middle of two cruel cultures: a culture of fear and

GUEST COLUMN
Seira Tamang



a culture of impunity. Both feed on each other.

Amnesty International defines a disappearance as 'a deprivation of liberty of a person, perpetrated by agents of the state or by persons or groups acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the state, followed by an absence of information regarding the deprivation or refusal to acknowledge it, or by the refusal to provide information on the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person or the concealment thereof'.

Given our world renowned rate of disappearances, current donor initiatives to strengthen the rule of law must be applauded, including resources spent to spread awareness and consciousness of laws and rights. However, it is also clear that such funding does not consider a critical issue: lawyers and our legal system are the only recourse to justice for the disappeared, their friends and families.

As demonstrated by the

ongoing tussle between the Supreme Court, the army and the countless stories of lawyers filing habeus corpus petitions on behalf of the disappeared, all the legal profession can do is essentially rely on its moral authority. Clearly, that holds little or no value in our increasingly militarised state. Outright denials of the existence of the disappeared from within the system is a norm, even when human rights lawyers have talked to detainees behind bars.

Witnesses to disappearances live in fear. Earlier this year, security personnel in eastern Nepal searching for a woman who was an eyewitness to the arrest, rape and killing of two young girls. They took her 15-year-old daughter girl instead who is now disappeared. These examples are illustrative of the moral level, as well as impunity, within which the state currently functions. How far away are we from the Peruvian situation of the 1980s in which whole villages of people were killed in order to erase evidence of extra-judicial killings by state forces?

It is not surprising that witnesses or victims are unwilling to go to court even if such cases happen to reach that stage. Indeed, lawyers who have themselves been illegally detained and tortured, are afraid and unwilling to come forward. Our judicial system, as in other countries, relies on people coming

forward to testify and press charges. In this current environment, this is not an option.

The educated elite, including lawyers, know that disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings are illegal. We know that legally, the army can only try army personnel and not civilians. And houses can only be legally searched during the day time, we have a right to ask for identity cards and we have a right to search the search parties before they enter our houses to make sure that they carry nothing that could be planted and then used against us.

We need no media campaign to let us know of our rights. But to what end? At a recent talk, the chair of the Nepal Bar Association said something simple and startling: "Human rights are the most fragile of our rights". We can clamour all we want, but when a gun is pointed at us, our rights don't stand a chance.

Those of us happily deceiving ourselves that as 'civil society' we have the moral edge and are the great bastion of democracy must realise that our levels of apathy and increasingly larger tolerance for known crimes, aids state encroachment of our rights. To break the cycle of fear and impunity, and to restore the moral authority of our judicial system, requires the voices of outrage from us, the relatively safe, and thus richly complacent, middle-class. ●

After a month of haggling between coalition partners over control of key portfolios, Sher Bahadur Deuba has finally succeeded in assembling a team. Looking at the crowd of usual suspects in the cabinet makes you wonder why it took Deuba so long to put this bunch together.

He went through the inevitable: suffer the indignity of compromising everything to please

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



his new partners. The farcical exercise of cabinet formation was made even more tragic by its sheer futility. His cabinet colleagues are going to have an even lesser role to play in the governance of the country. Unless parliamentary procedures are brought back on track, ministers in Singha Darbar have no responsibility, which means they have no right to set their own agenda. They are functionaries entrusted with the task of implementing the royal command.

Deuba knows his limitations, and he knows his coalition partners know it. But he decided to play along with the face-saving games of the RPP and UML. In order to placate his uneasy young

The usual suspects

The palace continues to be both referee and centre forward

cadres, Comrade Madhab Nepal had to show he was driving a hard bargain. Pashupati Sumshere is yet to prove that pulling down the government of his own party was somehow a worthwhile political exercise. Badri Prasad Mandal, the man behind the first public felicitation of King Gyanendra and deputy prime minister of first post-October Fourth order, must be having a hearty laugh at the discomfiture of all his coalition partners. He is the only one who doesn't need to prove anything to anybody, so he has happily accepted a downgrade.

Deuba's main task now is to keep his jumbo afloat. The military in Pakistan gives its civilian heads of government up to 30 months before it begins to rotate them. The Narayanhiti palace is no less adroit at keeping our politicians on their toes. In the BBC comedy series *Yes Minister*, someone says "permanence is power, rotation is castration". That seems to be the palace's motto as



NARENDRA BASNET

well.

Having read the signals more correctly, Comrade Khadga Oli, (Madhab Nepal's bete noir in the UML) gives this government a life span of six months. Deuba's own senior party colleagues aren't too happy with the composition of the government since it is dominated by those who were unable to even



get themselves elected to parliament in the last election. With a few exceptions, Deuba's party in the cabinet is represented by lightweights.

The RPP couldn't stand the stress and is cracking up: even while some of its stalwarts were taking their oaths at the royal palace, others were at the Hyatt

plotting a split. Thapa loyalists mulled three options: oust party chairman Pashupati Sumshere intensify the intra-party struggle, or launch a new party. They decided on the third.

So, to summarise, Narayanhiti Palace continues to be both referee and centre forward in this country's politics. An avowedly royalist outfit like the RPP is quite comfortable with this, the UML is satisfied with the pork barrel benefits of being in government and the less said about the politics of Badri Mandal the better. That leaves Deuba entrusted with the task of keeping this unruly herd together.

Deuba has to show he is boss when someone else is actually pulling the strings. For his own survival, Deuba must keep his hands off the serious games being played behind the scenes. His role on the stage is to keep people guessing. He can make it a little more tolerable by trying to be sincere and honest in doing what he is expected to do rather than pretending.

His sole agenda should be to make the lives of Nepalis a little more bearable in his third term. Other than that, there is very little he can do without risking being thrown out like his predecessors. ●

LETTERS

DEUBA

I was heartened to read the views of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba ('The Maoists are a bigger problem than the king', #203). The prime minister comes across as a realistic person who understands that the Maoists are 100 percent violent and are trying to take a shortcut to power through violence. It is clear that human rights organisations love to criticise the army only because if they say anything about the Maoists they get killed. If the Maoists are not interested in talking, then there is no other option for the army than to finish them off. The international community understands that the Maoists are a ruthless terrorist organisation, even if they keep calling for UN mediation. Deuba needs all the help he can get from the political spectrum to end violence, bring peace to the country, hold parliamentary elections, reestablish the government and start rebuilding Nepal so we can all live in peace. I strongly support Deuba. He is the only leader honest enough to move the country forward towards freedom and peace. Let's just hope he doesn't mess it up by being like his former mentor, Girija Prasad Koirala, who has to rush off to India at every opportune moment to get the blessings of Indian politicians. We must stay loyal to our country and sort out any problems ourselves.

Shiva Ghale, email

PURNA BAJRACHARYA

Americans can learn much from Purna Bajracharya, the innocent Nepali terribly mistreated by the misguided Bush Administration as if he were the terrorist that he is not ('I'll sue the US government', #203). As Americans who have lived and worked with humanitarian programs in Nepal for much of the past decade, and as a Peace Corps volunteer who taught in Nepali schools 40 years ago, we are shocked to hear how the Bush administration's Patriot Act has so terribly mistreated this unfortunate Nepali, guilty of little more than overstaying his visa. A suit against the US government would be an excellent test of the constitutionality of the wretched Patriot Act and signal to Americans how far off the track they've let American democracy drift. Purna Bajracharya's patience, forgiveness and generosity toward the government that so mistreated him give me hope in what might otherwise be a hopeless world. And yet this gracious and gentle Nepali, typical of his countrymen, forgives the US, "remains grateful that he experienced America..." Americans and Nepalis alike have much to learn about democracy and how dangerously it is being corrupted by the very administrations that trumpet its merits to a doubting world. And we have much to learn about forgiveness, gentleness and patience from our Buddhist friend. Let's learn the best from each other's cultures and systems and move forward together to clean up the messes in both our countries.

Malcolm and Marcia Odell, New Hampshire, USA

QUAGMIRES

Your editorial comparison between Iraq and Nepal is a bit far-fetched ('A tale of two quagmires', #203) For everything that you find similar between the two countries, I could point to plenty more that aren't the least bit the same. Iraq had a ruthless dictator who invaded his neighbours Iran and Kuwait, and gassed tens of thousands of his own people. Iraq was invaded and occupied by a foreign army, which, as you point out, was after its oil. The resistance against America may be painted by Washington as an al-Qaeda operation, but many are simply frustrated Iraqis who want the occupiers out.

J Moktan, Kathmandu

- Re: your editorial 'A tale of two quagmires'. The Deuba cabinet and the handover of Iraqi sovereignty are both fake. Virtual political or legal authority was declared back in the hands of Iraq's interim government in the same way that the palace blessed Deuba's multiparty team. Actual control on the ground remains with the US in Iraq and the royal palace here in Nepal. Sovereignty is absolute, a nation is either sovereign or it is not. Iraq remains occupied and Nepal's democracy is still in regression.

Name supplied, Kathmandu

FOG OF WAR

Re: Daniel Lak's 'Alternative to War' (#203). I doubt anyone who matters in the Royal Nepali Army has seen *The Fog of War*. Even if they have, no one seems to have drawn any lessons from it. I haven't seen the documentary myself, but I know that during Robert McNamara's tenure as US defence secretary, his technocrats came up with the infamous 'kill ratio' theory that was applied to gauge how the war in Vietnam was progressing. This led to fierce competition among US commanders on the ground to 'bag' as many of the 'enemy' as possible. Anyone was fair game as long as they were presumed to be on the other side. Innocent men, women and children (sometimes even infants) were killed and included in the statistics. Commanders who lagged behind in this race were seen to be less able and their careers suffered as a consequence.

From what I've been told by people close to Royal Nepali Army, something akin to this is happening in Nepal. Army commanders are under pressure to show results. And in turn they are putting pressure on officers and men below them. It is becoming increasingly a 'result oriented' army. The achievement of the troops on the ground is directly related to lucrative rewards such as being sent on foreign missions. It is not difficult to see that this can only lead to indifferent and indiscriminate action by a force that has grown weary of fighting a war that seems to have no end in sight. For a change, Daniel Lak is absolutely right, war is hell indeed.

Name supplied, Kathmandu

MAOIST UTOPIA

From your paper, I see that the Maoists are still maiming, torturing and murdering people they find disagreeable, which

happens to include all Nepali people who don't give them large portions of their material wealth, as well as Americans. Despite the fact that all Americans are hated by the Maoists, it is the Nepalis who have it worse. They do not only have to give the Maoists money, but also one healthy offspring per household. It is deeply reassuring to know that there are still some altruistic souls out there selflessly looking after the common man and woman. It is also heartwarming that the rebel leadership care so profoundly for the welfare of the people that they are willing to threaten and coerce them into joining the frontlines while they thoughtfully hide out in other countries. After all, if anything were to happen to these visionaries, who would think up ways to coerce the people to join the 'people's war' and convince them that all this violence is good for the country and the downtrodden? What better way to rid ourselves of such scum than to absolutely destroy Nepal? When they come to power, there will be no pocketing of public funds and no bribes. Why? Because there will be no money left in Nepal. I am ecstatic thinking about the future of Nepal under Maoist leadership.

Wallace Freeman, email

JUNK FOOD

I don't know if it was intentional or pure coincidence that *Nepali Times* #203 had Aruna Uprety's 'Junk food epidemic' and an interview with the CEO of an instant noodle manufacturer ('The noodle kingdom'). I



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

agree with Uprety that advertising, convenience and peer pressure has led children demanding instant snacks that should be avoided as far as possible. However, I fail to understand why more companies are bringing out ever more varieties of noodles into the market when the "production capacity is twice the consumption" and still claim to be a profitable enterprise. Most industries in Nepal fail because too many people copy successful products. The Nepali carpet industry was doing very well and was once the largest export industry. With too many entarnts in the industry, quality was compromised and brought about the its downfall. Pashmina met a similar fate. There were copycats

exist not only in the foreign export business but in the local market too. The recent glut of supermarkets, beauty parlours, Nepali restaurants and '99 shops' are part of the same trend. The snacks and chau chau market may appear to be booming, but aren't there already enough companies producing a surfeit of snacks for Nepal? The idea is not to copy what others are doing but to come up with new, more creative ideas for local and export industries.

Sangita Khatri, Kathmandu

CORRECTION

Due to a file transfer error, several mistakes crept into 'A high dam on the Kosi' in the hardcopy of #203. The correct version is in the online edition. -Editor



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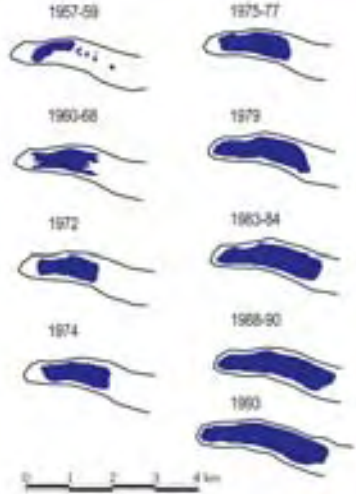
Global climate change is melting our glaciers, and this poses catastrophic threats to the region



NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Global climate change is melting Himalayan glaciers at an unprecedented rate, yet field research into this potentially catastrophic trend is lagging behind. There are 3,250 glaciers in the Nepal Himalaya and 2,315 of them contain glacial lakes that are increasing in size at varying rates. But no one really knows how many of them are in danger of bursting, and

without that information, steps can't be taken to drain the lakes or install early-warning systems for villages downstream. British geologist John Reynolds was involved in the project to siphon water off the Tsho Rolpa glacial lake in the Rolwaling valley a decade ago, but says the inventory of hazardous glacial lakes is outdated. "There has to be a fresh look at the entire issue



Tsho Rolpa in the Rolwaling (in 2000 at left) has been growing due to global warming.

because we may be running a high magnitude risk," Reynolds says. As glaciers shrink, the melting ice causes lakes to grow. The lakes can then breach the loose moraine walls, sending huge floods of water, mud and boulders downstream. Scientists call this GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood) and these have been occurring with increasing regularity in recent years.

A glacial lake burst in Khumbu in 1985 killed at least 20 people, washed away a hydropower station, the trekking trail to Namche and numerous bridges. The town of Pokhara is situated on the debris field of a gigantic 700-year-old flood that was caused by the emptying of a big lake below Annapurna. The worst-case scenario is a major Himalayan earthquake causing several dozen

glacial lakes to burst simultaneously. Aside from catastrophic floods, scientists are now also doing long-term computer simulations of how global warming will affect the flow of Himalayan rivers in this century. All indications are that spring flow in these rivers will increase over the next 40 years, but the time will come when there will be so little snow in the Himalaya that the rivers will run dry in the lean season. This won't just affect the lives of people in the mountains, but also hundreds of millions of people downstream.

Two years ago, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) sounded the alarm that 44 glacial lakes in Nepal and Bhutan were in imminent danger of bursting. There has been little followup field research since then.

Trends elsewhere in the world show mountain regions in the tropics are extremely sensitive to climate change. This year, the US-based Earth Policy Institute reported that the equatorial snows on Kilimanjaro could disappear by 2030. It said the Larsen Ice Shelf in the Antarctica has already shrunk by 40 percent. In Greenland, the Jakobshavn Glacier is now thinning four times faster than it was during the last century. In Central Asia's Tien Shan mountains, glaciers have shrunk by 30 percent between 1955 and 1990.

Scientists say this trend is also

affecting the Himalaya-Hindu Kush arc, but there has been no systematic research and regular monitoring since the mid-1990s. Even those studies showed disturbing trends. Records with the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DoHM) indicate Japanese researchers had found a majority of the glaciers in the Khumbu region had retreated 30-60m between 1970 and 1989. In the Dhaulagiri region, field studies until 1994 displayed the same trend. Nepal's most studied glacier in Tsorong Himal recorded a 10m retreat between 1978 and 1989.

The 2001 UNEP-ICIMOD warning was not based so much on field research as comparisons of satellite imagery. But even that was alarming enough. "We urgently need to update our glaciological data with field studies, otherwise we won't have any warning when disaster strikes," says hydrologist Arun Bhakta Shrestha at the DoHM.

A recent meeting of glaciologists in May in New Delhi analysed data on how the receding snowlines in the Himalaya caused by climate change would affect the flow of water in the Ganga, Brahmaputra and the Indus rivers. Hydrological simulations for various global warming scenarios showed increased snowmelt would swell rivers by as much as 90 percent in the next few decades before they start drying up.

"In some of the rivers, the flow may go down by as much as 90 percent," says glaciologist Syed Iqbal

Attention all aid-o-crats

Real work must now resume, this may be the country's last chance

I'm told that development types have been feeling complacent lately. They can open their *Nepali Times* each Friday morning without fear of attack on page four. Inside sources in various developmental agencies tell me that a great sigh of relief was heaved when I left the Himalayan kingdom.

And since then, my ranting and raving has been confined to various international issues that leave the aid-o-crats of Nepal free

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



to confuse and obfuscate

as they see fit.

Ha, no longer. For this week, a challenge goes out. The same agencies—bilateral, charitable, UN, World Bank, IMF and so on—that cheered the king's takeover in late 2002 have had a plethora of excuses since then for sitting on their behinds in Kathmandu, blithely sending Nepalis off to the field to do what work they have outside the capital.

They've commissioned study after study and avoided political reality—that there can be no development without democracy. This should be self evident, even to aid officials and diplomats who blindly and

mistakenly saw opportunity in King Gyanendra's October surprise. Two incompetent governments run by royal fiat have come and gone. Civil war continues to rage. Civil society either feels too powerless to intervene or meanders leaderless in the political ether of present-day Nepal. Poverty intensified. Inequalities are addressed increasingly through violence. Human rights are an abstract notion at best, widely ignored.

But changes have begun. A broad-based government of political parties, women, castes and regions sits in Singha Darbar, allegedly with executive authority from an evidently chastened king. There's talk of constituent assemblies, ceasefires and peace negotiations resumed.

Aid agencies must rise to the challenge. They must throw every effort into assuring that this very real opportunity to stop the entropy and reverse Nepal's long decline is not wasted. Real field work must now resume. Projects have to reach the needy and jobs need to be created from one end of Nepal to the other. Build roads, open health clinics, teach people political rights, do anything to spread the word that this could be the country's last chance.

If I had my way, it would be the last

chance for the expensive consultants, privatisers, conflict resolution types, civil society specialists, inclusionists and all the other wealthy tinkers who flock to the international teat in this country. They've presided over disaster after disaster. The country has become poorer on their watch, and they continue to blame Nepal and Nepalis for that. Oh for the day when an aid person actually sees a decline in income and career status when he or she leaves a country poorer or less developed than it was on arrival.

Let's have no more taking credit for the gains of democracy in the 1990s—media freedoms, indigenous human rights groups, legal reform courtesy of Sapana Pradhan Malla, Mandira Sharma and other courageous lawyers. Let the foreigners prove themselves by backing civil society and peace and widespread, inclusive development throughout this land on an intense and sustained basis.

Let's see some well manicured international hands covered with the dirt of effort, and some honest appraisals of the results. And in this I know I speak for millions of Nepalis. You've lived here and profited during Nepal's agony. Now put something back. Or go home. ●



SUBHAS RAI

Himalaya

Hosnain of the University of Calicut, who is studying glacier recession in India's Himachal Pradesh. Such predictions are corroborated by a small scale study in the Modi Khola, north of Pokhara. "The field study shows rivers will continue to have abundant water for the next 50-60 years," says hydrologist Mandira Shrestha at ICIMOD. After that, experts fear, the rivers' flows will decrease dramatically as the snows recede.

The risk of such drastic change is higher in the rivers of eastern Nepal because deglaciation is more pronounced there. Bhutan's glaciers, for instance, are receding three times faster than the glaciers in central Nepal because the mountains of the eastern Himalaya are getting more rain and less snow.

Nearly 70 percent of the water in the Ganga is from tributaries that flow down from Nepal, and if Himalayan glaciers dry up, they will cause the Ganga to dry up in the lean season too.

The Tibetan Plateau is a 'water tower' not just for the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Indus systems but also for the Yangtze, Mekong and the rivers of Burma which all have their headwaters in eastern Tibet.

The Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research at the Chinese Academy of

Sciences has reported receding glaciers in Tibet and Yunnan and warn that two-thirds of the glaciers in China will disappear by 2050 due to global warming, affecting some 300 million people living downstream.

Although evidence is piling up that climate change will have enormous short-term and long-term impacts in the region, scientists say there isn't enough field research to provide empirical proof about the seriousness of the crisis. At the DoHM, scientists want to do some measurements in the Langtang Glacier north of Kathmandu but can't afford the Rs 500,000 that it will cost. Last year, the UN provided Nepal, Bhutan and India with equipment to check the thickness of glaciers, but the apparatus is rusting at the ICIMOD office in Kathmandu because there is no money to take it up to the mountains.

There are signs that some international agencies are waking up to the gravity of the situation. The Worldwide Fund for Nature offices in Nepal, India and China are trying to begin joint glaciological studies. Says Chandra Gurung of WWF-Nepal: "Once we get the figures in, we will know the real scenario. Then we can plan." ●

A popular threat

Harka Bahadur Gurung knew he was putting his life on the line by not resigning as mayor of Pokhara, despite Maoist threats. "If the Maoists wish to kill me, let them do it," he used to say. "I am not corrupt, I serve the people." On 2 July, he was shot dead by rebels just outside his home. On Monday, thousands turned up at the mayor's funeral in Pokhara (right).

Harka Bahadur knew there was danger ever since the Maoists killed Birganj mayor Gopal Giri in April and injured the mayor of Butwal in an assassination attempt. He had been getting threatening calls, and told us recently: "Every day is a bonus."

In May, Harka Bahadur was shaken when the rebels killed tourism entrepreneurs Dil Man Gurung and Ishwor Gurung in Ghandruk. After the Kaski DDC president Kamal Man Gurung resigned under Maoist pressure, Harka Bahadur told the press in Pokhara that he would follow suit. He later changed his mind and obeyed the RPP's directive to remain in office.

The mayor was also under attack from the anti-'regression' parties who forcefully locked him out of his building last month. Harka Bahadur simply took his office to a chautari outside Pokhara and continued to issue citizenship papers, passports and other documents.

Harka Bahadur was a doer, and in the past nine months won accolades from citizens here who were sick of the violence and political disruptions that affected tourism. When the municipality did not have money, Harka Bahadur dipped into his personal bank account. His close friend Lieutenant Thaman Singh Gurung says, "Harka had integrity and he wanted to serve Pokhara." His project to rid Pokhara of garbage was beginning to work and will not suffer a setback.

Harka Bahadur thought his popularity and honesty protected him from the rebels. But, as with the DDC chairman of Rasuwa, hotel owners from Ghandruk, teachers and social workers from all over Nepal in the past seven years—the Maoists seemed to regard that popularity itself as a threat.

In recent weeks, Harka Bahadur had finally agreed to keep a bodyguard. Last month, security forces killed the local Maoist commander Raj Bikram Bhurtel and his wife, and the Kaski district administration said the situation in Pokhara had improved. The mayor started taking fewer precautions. Harka Bahadur is survived by four wives, five sons and three daughters. ●



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How far is it to Nuntala?

It is the time it takes to realise the soldiers are as frightened as you are, and if you run, they will shoot.

ALDEN PYLE in JUNBESI

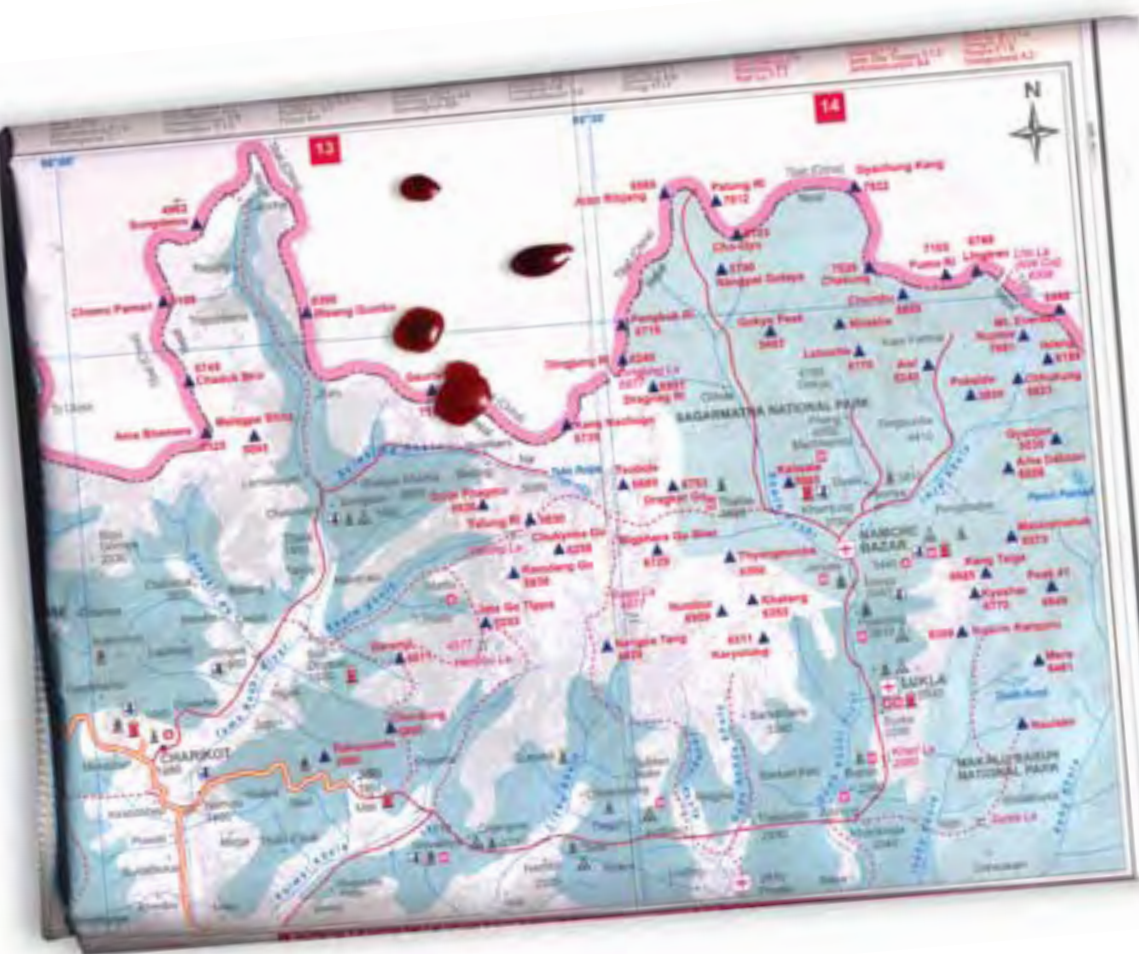
I felt sorry for myself when, imagining some non-existent reason to get back to Kathmandu, I rushed down from Bupsa and twisted my ankle.

Hobbling along, I really wanted to know just how long it would take for me to get to the warm lodge at Nuntala. I pushed through Jubing and crossed the bridge by noon, stopping to iodise my water and check the time so I would know when I could drink it. I climbed up to the small teahouses past the bridge and thought, surely it could be no more than two hours up the hill. I looked at my watch: 15 minutes till I could drink.

As I sat, a dozen soldiers appeared in the scrub at the far end of the small hamlet, with them two Nepali teenagers, a girl and a boy. They seemed to be arguing. The soldiers gestured at them with waves of their M-16s. The two were now hysterical, shouting back at the soldiers.

I looked at my watch, 13 minutes. When I looked up again, the two teenagers were running away from the soldiers, heads down and running hard towards where the plateau that the village stood on dropped to the river and the bridge. A couple of soldiers raised their weapons and almost casually fired five, six rounds. A short burst, and they both fell, one attempting to rise and failing. Two more soldiers walked over and one kicked them, hard, before bending with a pistol and making the dying youths almost sit up with the force of the coup de grace to the head.

I looked again at my watch, registering the fact that I had wet myself. Eleven minutes. The soldiers had seen me and as they prepared to leave, one of them walked over to me, hanging his head shyly like a guilty schoolboy. He



stood in front of me trying to summon up some English, finally settling on "bad people" before joining the rest of the platoon heading up to Khari Khola.

That night I asked Raju in Nuntala for a jug of chang. But after one sip, I was retching in the street, unable to stop shaking. I went to my bed, where I could not sleep.

The next day, coffee, breakfast and the climb to Takshindo. The hills were full of army, their cordon moving across the hillside, clearing out Maoists, the occasional burst of gunfire drifting across the hillside as I plodded up. At the Everest View, buying cheese and dried apples, a deaf-mute woman in her sixties mouthed at me, miming shooting. She pulled her skirt up to show a horrific khukri slash, half healed. The lodgekeeper told me Maoists

It is the time it takes to realise how short life is.

had done it.

The day and light were ending, and clouds were blowing up from the valley across the hill, parting over Takshindo. The lodgekeeper pointed out Thamserku and Kangtega. Why had it been so important for me to know which ones they were?

The lodge in Junbesi was warm and welcoming, the dining room sunny, as the Rai kitchenboy fried eggs. The sauni chatted to me about the Kathmandu schools her children attended. In the last 24

hours, I had turned into a complete chatterbox. Children, trekkers, shopkeepers. I seemed to need the sound of my own voice to confirm my existence.

The sauni's husband was keen to tell me how the army was in the woods above, between me and the Lamjura, chasing Maoists. I tried to ignore him, but as he talked I had to listen. When they caught Maoists, he told me, they tell them to go, to run away, and then they shoot them down. Villagers know not to run, to stay put and they will not shoot you. Then they know you are just gathering wood. I remembered the boy and the girl. But how do they know they are Maoists, I ask. He looked at me like I was stupid. "Because they run away."

A day in the hills of Nepal is a

life... a simple, trite, much used phrase. When you trek through these places you are lucky that from the morning peppery chia to the evening dal bhat, you are privileged to see a whole lifetime. You will become part of a landscape in motion as you move through ever-changing mountain views to the changing emotions that play across the faces of children. It will change your life as it has mine. But as I found, and continue finding, it could not be relegated to a corner of your life.

So how far is it to Nuntala?

It is the time it takes for ama to serve out a helping of yogurt and refuse payment. It is the time it takes Tashi in Kyangjuma to see our meal is perfect despite the huge trekking group we share her lodge with, and the fact that armed Maoists robbed her lodge last night. It is the time it takes to spend with a friend, it is the time it takes to realise the soldiers are as frightened as you are, and if you run, they will shoot. It is the time it takes to realise a remark is thoughtless and wish it unsaid. It is the time it takes to play with and talk to children rather than just photograph them and pass on. It is the time it takes to realise how short life is.

It is the time it takes to realise every moment is important and we can make a difference, both in our own lives and in the lives of those we meet along the way. Ask me anything but please not how far it is or how long it will take, because when you know that, you will also know that it will end. ●

Alden Pyle is the pseudonym of a trekker who travelled across the Junbesi valley earlier this year and witnessed the events described.

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The secret success of Nepali soap

Himalayan herbal soaps have carved a niche market that is poised to set an international trend



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Cruise through the toiletry aisle in any well-stocked Kathmandu supermarket and there will be a dizzying array of soaps. Attractively packaged and perfumed, most are the mega brands that are a testament to the relentless march of globalisation.

Increasingly, however, there is also a growing selection of exotic Nepali soaps that have enough unique selling points to appeal to consumers everywhere. To begin with, who can resist the cache of ‘handcrafted’? Add to that exotic Himalayan herbs, other natural ingredients, an Ayurvedic tradition, no animal testing and—*kaaachiiiiing*—cash registers are ringing here and abroad.

Ayurvedic soap recipes that have been around for thousands of years use natural oils mixed with Himalayan herbs for moisturising and medicinal properties. The formula may have been tweaked for modern users, but no one messes around with the basics.

One of the names that is fast

gaining an international following with a range of Made in Nepal handmade herbal soaps is Wild Earth. It was set up by entrepreneur Carroll Dunham almost a decade ago to support women’s income generation in Nepal and the Himalaya by exporting Ayurvedic soaps.

The company believes in literally going the extra mile. It was the first to craft soaps with fresh yak milk from Langtang, carried in ice coolers by porters from 8,000ft. Mixed with red clay, honey and a choice of lavender or vanilla oil, the yak milk soap became a bestseller among the 30 soap varieties in the Wild Earth stock.

The ‘Made in Nepal’ tag translates to value added and unique qualities that are especially attractive to international buyers who don’t want mass-produced generic soaps and shampoos. Nina Henning, managing director at Wild Earth explains: “Internationally, people are getting more interested in holistic health. It influences a person’s entire

lifestyle.” That means more Wild Earth soaps are making their way to bigger markets in the US and Australia, Europe, Canada, Japan and recently, even Brazil.

The fascination with a well-marketed version of Nepal’s exoticism is neither new nor difficult, and it is not just the West where it is becoming a rage. Japan is the biggest market for Cosmos Herbal, which started in 1994 as a Nepali-Japanese joint venture. Its soap recipe uses 20 aromatic and healing plants including lemongrass, citronella, palmarosa, basil, shikakai, aloe and spikenard. Cosmos Herbal exports an average of 50,000 bars a month. Administrative assistant Dev Shrestha is confident they can meet growing demands, which is good news all round. Higher demand means more jobs.

Soap making of these Nepali bars is entirely manual. Handmade soaps rely on the cold process, which is all about following the right recipe. Simplified, it involves mixing sodium hydroxide and base oils. This sets off a chemical reaction, which, when complete, leaves only soap and glycerine. Unlike commercial soap making, where the glycerine is stripped and used in other cosmetic products like creams, the cold process requires personal care and attention.

Besides creating more jobs, there are other indirect benefits. Since the soaps are made with many herbs traditionally used in the Ayurvedic healing system indigenous to the Himalaya, they are all found growing in Nepal. “The Himalaya are a treasure chest for medicinal plants,” says Henning. Communities involved in growing and harvesting the herbs find a market through soap makers. She adds, “One of Wild Earth’s roles is to link growers and harvesters of Himalayan herbs to international

markets.” The company encourages sustainable harvest practices and experiments with growing herbs at its medicinal herb farm in Nagarkot.

With virtually all the raw material available in Nepal, Sambhu Lama at Farm House Herbal is now working to make a 100 percent Nepali soap. The only stumbling block remains in finding all Nepali base oils. Though mustard, castor and neem oil is possible to source from Nepal, soap makers have to rely on coconut oil from India. But Lama is trying to substitute it with seed oil from the Churee tree, good for dry skin. It is fast growing and can be found in the western middle hills of Jajarkot, Rukum and Rolpa. “If we find Churee can be a substitute for coconut oil, we will get the indigenous Chepang community to harvest it,” says Lama.

Unlike some other Nepali products, the quality of Nepali handmade soaps still enjoys a spotless reputation. “I am confident

my line will pass any test in any lab anywhere in the world,” says Lama. While Nepali handmade soaps are popular abroad, the local market is taking time to catch on. And the price of these exotic soaps is the biggest deterrent. The cost of the best Himalayan herbs, pure base and essential oils drives the price higher than commercial soaps.

Even so, Lama decided to make a soap that fitted ordinary budgets, relying on a formula used by an Ayurvedic doctor for 25 years with consistent results. His secret ingredient is dri butter. “We’re used to calling in yak butter but that’s not correct because a yak is a male,” chuckles Lama. “We use dri butter, which has less water than milk and mix it with mustard oil—a combination of the high Himalayan and lowland secrets for good skin.” At Rs 85 for a 113g cake, My Favourite Soap is a bargain even by the standard of generic global brands. ●



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An alternative current



KUNDA DIXIT

At a time when most members of parliament are sitting around twiddling their thumbs, Hari Bairagi Dahal, the former UML representative from Sankhuwasabha is busy showing everyone that the future of Nepal is in hydropower.

An ex-politician from Khandbari shows how hydroelectricity can help fund local health and education

No, he is not talking about grandiose plans for high dams to export power to India, or expensive foreign-funded and foreign-built plants that generate electricity that no one can afford. Four years ago, Dahal and a few of his friends got together to build the three MW Puluwa Khola hydroplant near Chainpur in eastern Nepal. This is a model for small, decentralised, locally-built systems that sell power to the grid.

The privately-built and bank-financed Puluwa plant was delayed because of the conflict, but now that it is up and running, Dahal has another plan up his sleeve: make hydropower pay directly for local development.

"I always wondered whether hydropower is only a business or if it could be used to improve people's lives in a more immediate way," Dahal explained during a visit to Kathmandu. "So, I thought of building small hydropower plants, selling the electricity to NEA and using the money to finance schools and hospitals."

And that is exactly what Dahal

is doing by trying to rehabilitate the Khandbari small hydropower project that was commissioned in 1989 but was sabotaged by Maoists two years ago. Dahal and his friends are trying to raise money to rebuild the plant and use the money from the power to pay for several cooperative colleges in his district, including the Sankhuwasabha Campus in Chainpur, Barun Campus in Khandbari and the Madi Campus.

The 2.5 MW plant can be rehabilitated at a cost of Rs 10 million and put into operation in two years. Selling the power at Rs 3.50 per unit, the powerplant can earn up to Rs 1.5 million a year. The idea is to plough that money into the campuses, pay for teachers and the infrastructure, and provide hundreds of scholarships to ethnic, underprivileged students. A voluntary board consisting of campus chiefs, the DDC engineers, NEA and local educationists has already been set up in Khandbari.

"This is a great sustainable model to turn hydropower into development because it fosters



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Dahal is working to rehabilitate Khandbari's hydropower plant and get the distribution network (left) functioning again to pay for community education.

self-reliance, reduces dependency and give the people a sense of ownership," says Dahal. "When the government comes in and implements a large project, the local people have no stake in it, they hardly ever benefit, so they don't feel ownership."

Dahal says he is not the kind of person who just sits in Kathmandu lamenting about the state of the nation, the politics and the conflict, says one senior government official who has worked with him. "He is a doer,

and he has some very practical ideas, and this one is about communitising education."

Can this idea also be used in food deficit areas of far western Nepal? "Why not," says Dahal and immediately does some back-of-the-envelope calculations. "It costs about Rs 100 million to build a one MW plant. Selling that power will bring you Rs 30 million a year, which can buy you 100,000kg of wheat annually. Karnali will never have a food shortage with this plan." ●

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BIZ NEWS

Flying numbers

More good news on visitor numbers. Air arrivals are up by 37 percent at the half-year mark compared to the same period in 2003. But the totals are still 33 percent below the 1999 high. There is still some way to go before we can say Nepal's tourism industry is truly back on track. Interestingly, over the last month, arrivals from the UK, US, Germany, France and China all went up, but the number of Indian arrivals registered the first decline this year, decreasing by eight percent. Those in the business attribute this to the lack of regular flights between India and Nepal, plus the transport strikes and bandas, which lead to a series of cancellations. However, with the addition of flights by Jet Airways in June and Air Sahara this month, odds are Indian arrivals will grow rapidly.

Technically not Indian

The Indian government has announced the Direct Admission of Students Abroad (DASA) scheme for foreign students in technical institutions. This scheme was developed by Educational Consultants India Limited (EdCIL), under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, and features 15 percent supernumerary seats in all higher and technical institutions of India exclusively for foreign nationals and persons of Indian origin (PIOs). There is also a 50 percent tuition fee waiver for students from SAARC countries, for admission to undergraduate programs offered by the National Institutes of Technology and other institutions under the DASA scheme. For Nepali students, this offer may just open up doors right next door.

Zoo renovation

In a unique branding experience, Toyota and the VOITH group contributed Rs 4,497,193 to renovate the Central Zoo. The project, which began in May 2003, aimed to remodel the 72-year-old zoo's entrance plaza and Asiatic lion enclosure, plus construct the Siman Gibbon enclosure. The completed project was handed over to the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation this week.

NEW PRODUCTS



MOTORING ON: Continental Trading, Kia Motor's dealer in Nepal, has announced the arrival of the new Kia Picanto. Available in nine body and three seat colours, the Picanto—from the word piquant—is designed to handle both city traffic and the open road. Prices start at Rs 1,025,000, and go on up to Rs 1,299,000 for full options.

Mumbo jumbo cabinet
Deuba has pulled off a Laloo

Like the Bihari ex-chief minister—husband to the present one—the new Deuba cabinet not only kept everything within the family but also got enough ministers in the cabinet to cover all bases. We may have yet to

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

learn how to run a coalition as a perceived interim government but we succeeded in installing 31 ministers without the participation of the four major political parties, who are still protesting regression. But there is hope. For the first time, the deputy prime minister is a finance minister too. This makes the Beed happy because we seem to be towing the Manmohan line in India by finally giving the economy the importance it deserves. But will Bharat Mohan deliver? What we'd like to see are Companies Act, laws associated with trusts and legislation related to Nepal's passage into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) come through. This should provide an ironic twist, since it will be



approved by a communist minister. Perhaps we can depend on him to raise issues on the future of reforms and balance out a socialist agenda with a free market perspective. Our preparedness with regard to the WTO should be a top priority. The coalition government must come up with programs it can agree on, central issues that have a bearing on the direction of the economy. It must use the budget as a clear message that it means business. One of the surprises in the new cabinet is that there isn't a full minister of water resources—especially at a time when India wants to open bilateral dialogue on water and power. We need a full-fledged minister as water and power are critical to the Indo-Nepal relationship,

especially with a new government in South Bloc. Or is the state minister going to do his mentor's bidding? The absence of a parliament weakens internal controls in government budgets, both revenue and expenditure. All the more reason for this cabinet to maintain fiscal discipline and promote transparency. Multi- and bi-lateral donors need to see some delivery to increase their failing confidence in Kathmandu's ability to govern. If this government wants to earn credibility, financial discipline should be the starting point. It is not pointless to continue drilling successive governments on the importance of 'starting right and starting clean'. Something may actually come of it. ●

Readers can post views at arthabeed@yahoo.com

Crity Awards to upgrade ad quality



KIRAN PANDAY

Bhaskar Raj Rajkarnikar of Ad Avenues is also the president of the Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal (AAAN), which is hosting the Crity Advertising Awards 2061 at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza on Sunday.

How are this year's Crity Awards shaping up?
This is the second year we're having the awards and we have added five categories: best television commercial producer, best radio jingle maker, best art direction and best outdoor production. There are 23 participating agencies, and 200 nominees in ten categories. We'll have an awards ceremony with up to 500 people and a gala dinner.

So what is it that you're doing differently this time?
This time it is more a celebration of media in Nepal. Ultimately, the survival of media depends on advertising. We are making room for more advertising-oriented entertainment. Jane Subba from Ramp is doing the choreography and their designer is also involved. There is a Crity song.

And have the media shown enough support?
The media has been very supportive and we are not taking sponsorships from any product manufacturer. This is totally an awards ceremony for the industry and everyone, Kantipur, Himalmedia, Himalayan Times, NepalTV, Radio Nepal, Samacharpatra, Samaya are involved. And all the television channels are broadcasting the event live.

What do you hope to accomplish with the awards?
Qualitative growth of advertising in Nepal. There has been a growth in quantity, now we want the media industry to also strive for excellence in content. We hope the awards will help creativity among advertising professionals, agencies, technical quality, mode of operations and career development of professionals. Last year people were not prepared for the Crity Awards. This time, we have seen a lot of ad agencies saying "we have to send this to Crity, let's make a good campaign".

Is the country's economic situation a worry?
Despite all the problems we don't have minus growth. This is a Rs 2,000,000,000-a-year industry, but the overall economic situation has an impact. Till two years ago we registered an

annual 25 percent growth, but not any more. Manufacturing, trade and investment have taken a knock and this has affected advertising. Even so, we will soon have 56 FM stations in this country, more than seven television channels, and many big publication houses. For example, Prisma is registering an annual Rs 120,000,000, Thompson is clocking Rs 140,000,000 in transactions.

How does this compare with India?
In terms of quality and quantity, Nepal's ad industry is much smaller. But what we want to prove is that even with smaller volume we can aim for quality and creativity. Look at the multinationals that are dubbing ads here. We would like to encourage Nepali production in Nepal. But things are changing, as you may have noticed with the Nepal Lever Close Up ads or Dabur.

What are the main challenges in the ad industry?
The government and AAAN published a national advertising policy, but it exists only on paper. There are five players here: the advertising agency, the advertiser, the media vehicle, the target audience and the government. All must follow guidelines and rules for the industry to function smoothly. This way all advertising expenses will come on track and international standards will be adhered to vis-à-vis targeted advertising, circulation and ratings data, and content. An advertising council is needed to implement the national advertising policy so that questions of quality, circulation, code of conduct and a continuity of regulation are addressed.

There are clearly some ads in very poor taste.
The code of conduct in the national advertising policy will address that. We do have very poor quality advertising in liquor and other sectors. They are not even in harmony with cultural mores, and community values. There may be pressure from the manufacturer, but for now it is up to the ad agencies to address concerns of taste and acceptability.

Living a little bit longer

Donor priorities and government neglect prolong the anguish of Nepali AIDS patients

NARESH NEWAR in MAKWANPUR

With her parched lips, shrivelled face and skeletal body showing advanced stages of malnourishment, Shila Tamang stumbles around in her dark bedroom looking for a piece of roti.

Living alone with full-blown AIDS, 30-year-old Shila has not eaten for days. She is so weak that she has to use her hands to drag herself around. Abandoned by her parents and shunned by neighbours in this district south of Kathmandu, she is running a high fever and is suffering from tuberculosis and hepatitis C. The district hospital is miles away and the nearest government health clinic is a three-hour walk. "I want to die now," is all Shila can say. "Help me."

Health care used to be scarce at the best of times in these neglected districts of Nepal. But the country now has an estimated 60,000 people with HIV to take care of. Surviving on meagre incomes, most patients can't even afford food and basic medicines, let alone anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs that have made the disease manageable in the West.



Many Nepalis like Shila Tamang are dying before their time from secondary infections and malnutrition. That this should happen in Nepal, where millions of dollars in international aid is invested to control the epidemic, is ironic. Activists say poor Nepali patients see very little of the aid money because most of it is used for prevention, information and awareness, rather than for care and support, which some donors consider to be too expensive.

According to UNAIDS, about 10,000-15,000 Nepalis are expected to die of AIDS every year in the absence of effective treatment and care. "The donors consider this a low priority because they believe it is not economically viable," says activist Rajiv Kafle, who leads regular



Makwanpur's idyllic countryside hides an AIDS timebomb, women like Shila Tamang (below) wait to die while donors and government debate whether funding drugs that would prolong her life is appropriate.

sit-ins in front of the UN building in Kathmandu, urging officials to prioritise care and support.

Activists like Kafle want the government to provide cheap or free ARV drugs to patients. But this treatment is fraught with problems. For some donors, such as USAID, it could mean having to provide expensive, branded ARVs, rather than the much cheaper generic versions because the US government adheres strictly to its patent laws.

Some donors in Kathmandu also argue that Nepal lacks the clinics, district hospitals and distribution units needed to provide effective ARV treatment. So far, ARVs are a priority only in countries with a high prevalence of HIV (one percent or more) in the general population.

USAID lists Nepal as one of 10 priority countries that have a low HIV/AIDS prevalence, there are nine other high prevalence priority countries. In low prevalence countries, it aims to deliver prevention programs, while in high prevalence countries it implements a package that includes care and support activities.

Donor priorities are written into Nepal's national AIDS strategy for 2002-2006, which declares: "In a

resource-poor setting like Nepal, immediate universal access to anti-retroviral therapy and certain other AIDS-related medical interventions is not possible."

The National Centre for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC) is strapped for cash too. With less than Rs 5.6 million coming from the government's health budget, the centre is too donor-dependant to act independently.

In May, the government announced that it would provide ARV therapy to 100 more AIDS patients, adding to the 25 currently on the drugs. But the government depends on hand-outs from the Global Fund even for such a small number.

There are no accurate figures for just how much aid money Nepal gets for AIDS, but it is much higher than many other Asian countries. UK's Department for International Development (DFID), for instance, has given about £2 million since 2002. And half the \$30 million allocated to all health programs by USAID since 1993 has gone to AIDS work.

As with many other poor countries, funds do not go directly to the government. For instance, much of USAID's money is

channeled through three large American NGOs that in turn support 40 smaller local groups. DFID funds are distributed through the UN system in Nepal.

Some government officials complain privately that most donors and their international partner NGOs lack transparency about how the funds are being used. "It is our own fault, we are not able to effectively scrutinise their proposals and monitor them," one senior health bureaucrat told us.

The NCASC itself suffers from political meddling—six of its directors were sacked in the last four years. "The role of donors becomes more powerful when the government is weak," says health activist Renu Rajbhandari.

Donors officials deny they are calling the shots. "If there is pressure, it's pressure to move forward to achieve its goals," says Anne M Peniston, deputy director of USAID's family and health planning office in Kathmandu.

UNAIDS' country coordinator for Nepal, Michael Hahn, says: "The problem is, how do we get things moving?"

Some activists are worried that donors don't give adequate importance to care and support,

counselling and testing facilities, and this means the poorest are the hardest hit.

Providing care and support to infected people need not necessarily be difficult to implement or expensive, they add. Gains can be made in counselling and TB-control and care can be made home based, all of it with very little money, especially when the work is done by small, community-based organisations.

No one seems to ask the AIDS patients what they want. Almost every infected person we met in Kathmandu and rural Nepal say all they need is money for care and support. They are sharply critical of all the aid money that is wasted.

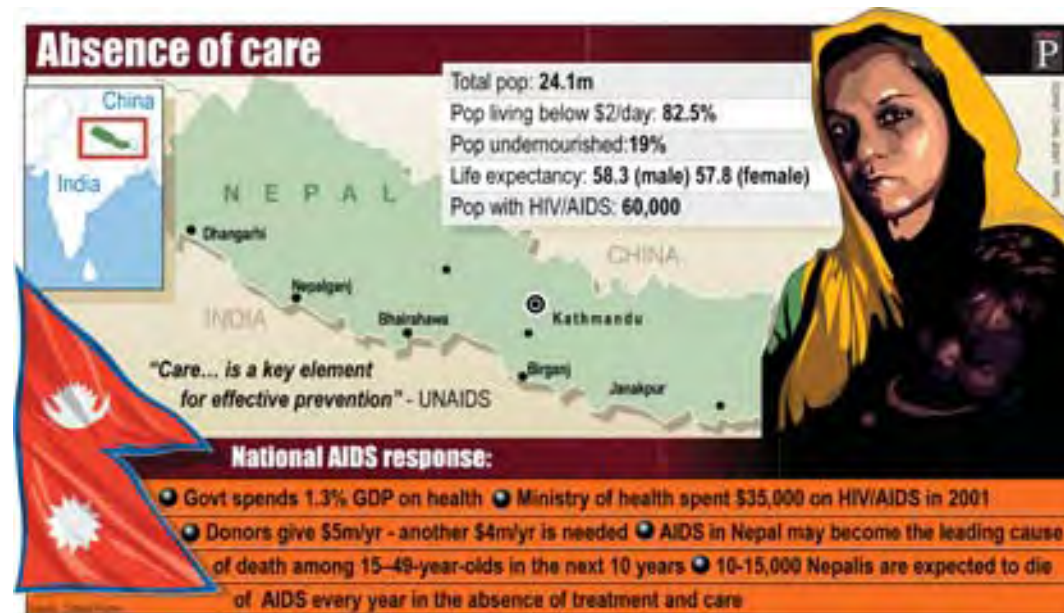
"So much money is spent on hoardings and advertisements for condoms—there is so little investment in saving lives," says Biswo Khadka, director of Maiti Nepal, one of a handful of NGOs providing ARV treatment, medical support and home-based care with funding from small charities around the world.

But some public health experts agree that care and support programs may not be practical to enforce now. "It would be costly, and the donor agencies will have to deliver their services through the local infrastructure, which is weak," says Bijay Rajkumar, an adviser to Save the Children (UK).

But this back-and-forth discussion is far removed from the desperate lives of patients like Shila Tamang. There are cases of infected women committing suicide and children dying from infections and lack of food. In these far-flung districts, patients are not demanding exotic ARV drugs, their need is basic: food and drugs to treat infections.

"Should we just stand by and let them suffer?" asks an angry Radhika Chaulagain, an activist in Makwanpur town who helps a group of infected women with free medicines, food and HIV-testing with the little money she gets from charities. "What happens to all the foreign aid we hear about all the time?" ●

(This report was made possible with support from the Panos Institute.)



ALL PICS: NARESH NEWAR



RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

Kaushalya is convinced her unborn baby would be alive today if she was not compelled to abort it by the so-called 'HIV/AIDS mafia'.

Trouble began for Kaushalya after her husband Ranbir, who drove buses for the state-owned bus company died of tuberculosis in 1996 shortly after he tested positive for HIV. Doctors refused to attend to Ranbir and advised her to abort the son she was then carrying "for her own safety".

Ostracised and humiliated by an orthodox community, Kaushalya sought help from human rights activists to undergo further tests that revealed that neither she nor her three young daughters had HIV. Earlier tests were obviously defective. Kaushalya has now remarried and is the mother of a healthy fourth daughter with her second husband. Today, this frail but plucky woman, who lives in a village in Haryana, believes that no other woman must suffer the pain and humiliation

Anti-ARV in India

Some Indian activists say free anti-AIDS drugs will only benefit the AIDS mafia

that she underwent because of flawed HIV/AIDS policies.

At the moment, Kaushalya is busy opposing a public interest litigation case before the Supreme Court that wants the government to provide free anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, which slows down the multiplication of HIV, to all who need it through the public health system. "These are (actually) private interest litigations—people like me who live in villages are never going to benefit from any government programs—we are better off left alone," said Kaushalya.

The activist group, Joint Action Council (JAC) is backing Kaushalya and argues that the real aim of those pushing for free anti-retrovirals is to pressure the government into placing bulk orders for the drugs and bail out pharmaceutical companies.

In April, the government responded to demands from NGOs and organisations of people with HIV to provide free ARV treatment in six high-prevalence states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Manipur and Nagaland.

Under the program, an estimated 100,000 people, starting with seropositive mothers and children below 15, are expected to be covered by the end of 2005, according to the National AIDS Control Organisation

(NACO). But community health experts also say that pushing ARV treatment in itself would not address the spread of HIV/AIDS.

They have said that introducing ARV treatment, which calls for close monitoring, through the ramshackle public health delivery system is a scheme that entails huge risks. The health system is riddled with corruption, diversion of costly drugs into the black market and poor patient compliance with drug regimens.

Anti-retroviral drugs, usually a combination of at least three different anti-HIV medications, need to be taken on a regular schedule everyday for it to work. Once ARV therapy is started, it requires continuous monitoring for side effects and drug resistance. Psychological support and advice on nutrition need to be provided.

In fact, activist groups like JAC challenge the very notion that there is an AIDS epidemic in India such as to warrant the declaration of a national emergency. There are estimated 3.8 million to 4.5 million HIV cases in India, while the cumulative known AIDS cases nationwide number nearly 70,000. Critics say in a country of billion people, this is not an epidemic and India has much more serious problems like malnutrition and hunger. ● (IPS)

INSPIRE YOUR WORLD

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STATUTORY DIRECTIVE: SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

SURYA

“The king and the Maoists have a common interest”

Mohan Bikram Singh, underground leader of NCP United Centre-Masal, interviewed in *Nepal*, 4 July

नेपाल

You don't seem to favour a constituent assembly anymore.
That is not true, we have advocated a constituent assembly since the beginning, and even boycotted the general elections for that reason. But the royalists are using the concept to destroy the present constitution and hand over authoritarian power to the king. The Maoists also want to change the constitution, but are actually helping the king achieve his goals by chanting slogans for a constituent assembly. Our protest is against such motives. But our demand for a constituent assembly is still our major slogan in the anti-regression movement.

Is a constituent assembly possible with the present constitution?
We are not saying that we can create a constituent assembly through this constitution. But the constitution should be kept intact until high-level authority is given to us and a constituent assembly is created.



NEPALNEWS.COM

But does this not mean that the constitution, which helped the king to take over, will keep the royal power intact as the Maoists allege? Are you, by any chance, speaking in favour of the king?
Actually, the king and the Maoists have a common interest in bringing an end to the present constitution. Earlier, both the Maoists and royalists were united in attacking the parliamentary system. They were working together to dissolve parliament, bring down the elected government and eliminate the constitution. Through their writing and press statements, both Baburam Bhattarai and Prachanda aligned themselves with late King Birendra.

But why does your party disagree with such notions?
There is a difference of opinion regarding the Maoists. Some of our friends from the former United Centre see the Maoists as the true Marxist-Leninist power. We do not. We regard the Maoist leaders as opportunists.

But they are spreading across the country.
The growing power of a communist party is less important than gaining popular support and political credibility. The Maoists have made serious political mistakes by attacking the parliamentary system, working in tune with the activities of the king and trying to get support from the US and Europe. The king and India both used the Maoists to end the constitution and interfere with national affairs. All this proves that the Maoists have been working against their own principles, especially as they also attacked farmers, labourers, teachers and students on a nation-wide scale. The leaders are opportunistic and crimes are being committed at the lower levels.

Aren't you envious of the Maoists' success?
There are always accusations. Take a look at the Maoists' activities. Did they not expressed their unity with King Birendra? Did they not support the idea of an open economy? They killed, looted and abducted ordinary citizens. Do all these actions adhere to Marxist principles? We have to take this into consideration as well.

Do you, like the Maoists, have personal relations with several political parties?
Not long ago we struggled against the Nepali Congress. Now we are making efforts to join hands with them.

Till when do you intend to remain underground?
Our struggle will continue for a long time, as we still don't have a real democracy. Regression is still a huge threat.

Mine land

Kantipur, 4 July

क्रान्तिपुर

Mines are a way of life in Salleri. They are planted everywhere, even on private land and landowners are not compensated. Two policemen were injured in mine explosions. Recently, the people had another mine scare. A group of travellers had gathered at the district headquarters to share their experiences of trekking around Solukhumbu when a loud explosion rent the tranquil air. Everyone was thrown into a panic, thinking the Maoists had launched another attack, a distinct possibility with rebels stationed only four days away. Later, they discovered that a jackal had stepped on a mine. “These mines explode if they are weighed down by anything over one kg,” an official explained. While mines are a real danger, the security forces see them as a protection against Maoist attacks. The entire district headquarters is surrounded by barbed wire, some of it rumoured to be poisonous. In a few places, notice boards warn, “Danger, live current”. After sunset everyone goes indoors and avoids talking to strangers. There are no social gatherings or parties at night. “All celebrations have to end during the day,” said DDC president Ang Babu Lama. “The security forces want everyone in their own homes by the evening.” From inside their houses, locals can see the sweep of torchlights late at night, occasionally broken by warning shouts of, “Watch out! Fire!” Troops also bang tin cans or drums. All this is enough to keep everyone on edge. The biggest risk is being caught in the searchlight. If you get pinpointed, there is a high chance you will be shot. While locals are getting accustomed to the change in their lifestyle, no visitor

willingly chooses to spend a single night in Salleri.

Gang wars

Samaya, 2 July

समय

The bloodbath between two notorious rival gangs in Kathmandu intensified over the last few weeks. Gang leaders Milan Gurung ‘Chakre’ and Dipak ‘Manangey’ unleashed their goons in a series of revenge attacks against each other. In May, Chakre survived a lethal attack by Manangey’s group at Maharajganj, but his arm was severely injured in the fight. Chakre vowed to avenge the attack, and on 1 July, his brother Tejendra Gurung led an attack on Manangey near Jai Nepal Cinema. Though he was assaulted with khukuris and swords, Manangey survived. The police have been criticised for failing to control the situation. They, in turn, blame the politicians for protecting the gangs, but questions have also been raised at the ‘suspicious behaviour’ of the police, who are often accused of being associated with one side or the other. After Chakre was arrested last week, his rival Manangey, who was being treated at Bir Hospital managed to escape just a few hours later. Although a case was filed against Manangey, an arrest warrant was never issued. It seems Chakre also has friends in the police force. When Manangey’s wife went to the police station to file a case against her husband’s attackers—Chakre’s brother and five gang members—she was arrested instead. Chakre is accused of the contract killing of a woman last year. However, in the absence of strong evidence, he will soon be released on a bail of Rs 27,000. No action has been taken against him for the attacks on Manangey.

Meanwhile, Manangey is on the run, but the police say there is not enough evidence to convict him. “Even when there is sufficient evidence, they get away easily due to pressure from the politicians,” says a police source.

Executions

Editorial in *Samacharpatra*, 4 July

समाचारपत्र

The Maoists killed yet another city mayor, after accusing him of not following their orders. First, they killed the mayor of Birganj, Gopal Giri, for refusing to pay extortion money. They have now shot Mayor Harka Bahadur Gurung of Pokhara. It is obvious they are vying for a one party autocratic system. No matter how much they talk about supporting democracy, it is easy to judge from their actions whether they mean it or not. Besides the executions of the two mayors, they attacked and severely wounded the mayor of Butwal, Punaram Pokhrel, and targeted numerous VDC officials. In the last nine years of the ‘people’s war’, many political leaders, students, teachers and journalists as well as innocent farmers lost their lives because they disagreed with the Maoists. For a long time, the Maoists tried to put an end to local bodies. They have destroyed many VDCs and killed people’s representatives. Just after former Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa announced his intention to fill in vacant government posts in the village wards, the Maoists intensified their threats, abductions and killings. This led to the government officers assigned to the local bodies resigning en masse. Those who have not quit their jobs were threatened with death. The Maoists have constantly claimed that they are forced to take up arms to restore

Pot: All party government

स्पेसटाइम टैमिक *Spacetime*, 4 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The Indian ambassador said in a press release that such incidents happen occasionally. What can we say to those who have no shame at all?”

Journalist Madan Regmi, in response to the Indian nationals caught with arms at Thankot, in *Janadharna*, 1 July



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

democracy. They say they will respect individuals who have different political views than their own when they form the government. But in reality, things are just the opposite. They have formed their own ‘people’s government’ in Maoist dominated areas and non-Maoists have not been given the chance to participate. This only reflects their desire to form an autocratic system in the country. If they are really fighting the war for the Nepali people, then the least they could do is stop killing innocent, unarmed people.

PLA
.....
Maoist leader Agni Sapkota in *Janadesh*

With total trust in supreme commander Comrade Prachanda, our Peoples’ Liberation Army

जनदेश

(PLA) has been able to set unbelievable records in terms of bravery and sacrifice. Now, it has become necessary to develop at the political level. We have been working on this since the collapse of the ceasefire last year up until the point when we began decentralised action. But since the PLA will have to bear more crucial responsibilities in the days to come, development at the political level has become even more important.
The party will have to take serious initiative to strengthen the interrelation between the party and the PLA. At this point, our party has been placing the PLA and military action at the core of our activities. This policy needs support from every committee at all levels. This cooperation is directly associated with the victory of our revolution.
Therefore, the following steps

must be taken to help the PLA, which is the backbone of our party and the people’s government:

- Proper management for the treatment and security of comrades who are injured in battle.
- Special plans of district level organisations of the party for PLA recruitment.
- Arrangements of logistics and combat materials.
- Politicisation in the families of the PLA.
- Intelligence gathering on the enemy.
- Awareness among PLA soldiers about the enemy.

The party and the PLA should both try to intensify positive relations with the people. Believing in people, serving them, being close to them and aiming for the people’s welfare are the basis of our principles.

Hush

Deshantar, 4 July देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

A big mystery surrounds the six security personnel and a civilian from India who managed to enter the country with arms and ammunition. Among the arrested was Bajresh Singh, brother of the Minister of Uttar Pradesh. The Indians had sten guns, LMG and pistols when they were arrested on 29 June at Thankot. They managed to travel all the way from Bhairawa, past tight security checks along the highway to reach the Valley. It is quite apparent that there is a conspiracy going on between the security forces.

According to Nepali law, the perpetrators should have been imprisoned for two years and fined Rs 6,000 each, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) not only released the arrested Indians but handed them over to the their embassy without any legal charges against the unlawful act. The government has not been able to justify its actions to a dissatisfied Nepali public. Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy hasn’t issued so much as a formal apology. We approached the MFA for clarification but they passed us on to the Home Ministry.

The biggest surprise is the silence of the political parties on the issue. Neither the Nepali Congress nor the UML, both of which strongly protested Indian security personnel entering Nepal and raiding a house in Baneshwor, have not uttered a peep. Even the leftist parties that usually make mountains out of minor Indian interference in our affairs haven’t spoken up. Hom Nath Dahal, leader of the ruling NC-D refused to comment. Sadhbhabana (Anand Debi) leader Hridayesh Tripathi pretended to be ill when asked for a quote. NC spokesperson Arjun Narsingh KC says his party does not have enough information about the incident. Former foreign minister Prakash Chandra Lohani was surprised: “Is there no law against foreigners walking around with arms in this country? And why are the parties so quiet even when the government is unable to explain anything?” Among the few politicians who cared to comment was Amik Sherchan of Jana Morcha Nepal: “We have to understand that they came here with the intention of causing a big incident. No tourist travels around with lethal weapons.”

Peace now

Translations of editorials from national Nepali dailies on the expanded multiparty cabinet, 6 July

All-party government?

Kantipur कान्तिपुर

After 33 days, it is good news that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba finally managed to form a multiparty cabinet. The bad news is that he also included two royalists, shattering his own vision of an all-party representation. Deuba says the duo represent civil society, but they are merely the king's representatives. It is definitely not in the interest of democratic parties to involve royalist Mohammed Mohsin, who was given the portfolio for the significant Ministry of Information and Communication. The message is clear: the palace wants a share of everything everywhere.

Congratulatons!

Rajdhani राजधानी

The recently formed coalition government represented by Nepali Congress-D, UML, RPP and NSP is definitely different from the last two. Our hope now is on Deuba and his ministers to bring political stability and start peace talks with the Maoists. But all the parties must face severe criticism for the length of time they took to prepare a Common Minimum Program (CMP) and to join Deuba. It became quite evident that they had vested interests. If it there was genuine concern for the country, a CMP would’ve been finalised in a couple of hours, not after more than a month.

Peace first

Samacharpatra समाचारपत्र

Now that the four parties have joined the government, they must make clear plans for peace public. This is their top priority and prime responsibility. The parties should be very serious about implementing their CMP. The people are not interested in which party is involved in the government or who gets what ministry. Their concern is peace. The all-party government has to move ahead by making a ceasefire and peace talks their main political agenda. Only this can restore the democratic rights of the people and make general elections possible.



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AIDS in Asia

Catastrophe-in-waiting



With only one in four new HIV cases being reported from Asia, the sprawling continent is on the verge of being felled by an AIDS epidemic that would dwarf the devastation wrought by the killer disease in Africa, experts warn. "Asia is now facing life and death choices when it comes to the epidemic," Kathleen Cravero, deputy executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on

HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), said at the launch of a global report on the pandemic. If the region fails to implement effective prevention programs, "we will see an epidemic the likes of which we never imagined despite what has happened in Africa," she said.

By the end of 2003, Asia had an estimated 7.4 million people living with HIV out of the 38 million adults and children infected with the human

immunodeficiency virus (HIV) worldwide, the '2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic' revealed. During that year, close to half a million people are estimated to have died by the virus that causes AIDS, while 1.1 million people became newly infected. Such a grim picture has been fed by the rapid increase in HIV infections from two of Asia's most populous countries—China and Indonesia—and nearby Vietnam.

"In China, 10 million people may be infected with HIV by 2010 unless effective action is taken," the UNAIDS report warned, while in Indonesia six of the country's 31 provinces "are badly affected". These three countries are among the region's most populous, with China being home to 1.3 billion people, Indonesia having 203 million and Vietnam 77 million people.

To compound that is the report's remarks on India: it has "the largest number of people living with HIV outside South Africa—estimated at 4.6 million in 2002". Yet it is a picture that is deceptive and can result in complacency, given the criteria used, percentage of population, to calculate if a country's HIV prevalence rate has reached a point to be deemed an epidemic. In this light, countries like China, India and Indonesia appear marginally affected when set against the high percentages in African countries reeling under the AIDS epidemic.

According to the UNAIDS report, China and Indonesia have 0.1 percent of their population aged between 15-49 years infected with HIV, as opposed to Botswana, which has 37.3 percent of the population infected with HIV, South Africa with 21.5 percent of HIV prevalence and Zimbabwe, with 24.5 percent HIV prevalence. Of the Asian countries, only Cambodia, Thailand and Burma have the percentages to be considered facing an AIDS epidemic, with Cambodia being the worst affected with 2.6 percent of its population suffering from HIV and Thailand with 1.5 percent. Such low percentages, though, cannot be glossed over, asserted Cravero, since Asia is "potentially worse than Africa because of the numbers".

What are also setting the two continents apart are the factors that have fuelled the rapid spread of HIV. In Asia, injecting drug use has been a major contributor, states the report. "Among injecting drug users, HIV prevalence is 35-80 percent in

Xinjiang, and 20 percent in Guangdong," the report notes in reference to two provinces in China.

HIV prevalence rate among Indonesia's 125,000-195,000 injecting drug users "has increased three-fold—from 16 percent to 48 percent between 1999 and 2003," the report states. "In 2002 and 2003, HIV prevalence ranged from 66 percent to 93 percent among injecting drug users attending testing sites in the capital city, Jakarta," it adds. Furthermore, sex between men has also been identified as a reason for the escalating HIV rates in Asia.

South Asian sex workers are also vulnerable to the spread of HIV, due to low condom use by their male clients. Yet HIV/AIDS activists say that this reality will not change unless the region's governments pursue a more enlightened approach, particularly in policies to bring those who inject drugs into the fold of AIDS prevention and care.

Most detrimental to the region would be punitive policies such as the one pursued in 2003 by the Thai government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra against drug users, said Paisan Suwannawong, director of the Thai Treatment Action Group. That year, the Thaksin administration launched a harsh 'war on drugs' to rid the country of its amphetamine addiction, but this nine-month campaign resulted in over 2,200 people being killed for allegedly being part of the country's narcotics trade. "The 'war on drugs' forced intravenous drug users underground out of fear that they will be killed or be put on a list of being a drug user," Paisan added. "Many drug users stopped going to the treatment centres."

On Tuesday, HIV/AIDS activists announced the plans they would pursue during the 15th International AIDS Conference to be held in Bangkok from 11-16 July to lobby governments to see vulnerable groups in Asia in a more sympathetic light. ●

(Marwaan Macan-Markar/IPS)

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Under a shroud

More than a million women died in five years because of failed aid

SANJAY SURI in LONDON

More than a million women died over the five-year period between 1996 and 2001 because rich nations failed to honour their commitments to promote sexual and reproductive health, a group of NGOs said at the launch of a new campaign in London last Thursday. The total number will be considerably more in the decade since the developed countries made their commitment at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, they added.

The NGOs came together in a campaign 'Countdown 2015' to call on governments to pay. An analysis of government budgets by the US based Population Action International shows that developed countries had made a commitment of \$30 billion for the period 1996-2001 over which the budgets were examined. The amount paid was a little more than \$10 billion, leaving a shortfall of almost \$20 billion. Countdown 2015 NGOs figure the money that fell short could have prevented 268 million unwanted pregnancies, 113 million induced abortions, 7.2 million infant deaths and 733,000 pregnancy related deaths.

US policies have presented a particular problem. Under US law passed by the Bush administration within the first week of President George W Bush taking over, US funding is denied to any agency that provides abortions or engages in abortion counselling or referrals. "The funding is denied even to groups for activities like fighting HIV and AIDS if another part of the group engages in abortion services," said Julia Ekong from Marie Stopes International. The groups campaigning for more spending on reproductive health say the US, in effect, achieved the opposite of what it had professed to, because it meant many more women resorting to illegal and unsafe abortions.

The US government, which was due to spend \$12.3 billion for sexual and reproductive health aid, ended up spending about \$4.1 billion during the five-year period studied. That still meant that the US paid 30 percent of its due, percentage-wise a good deal more than France, which paid no more than three percent of what it was committed to for the period. Several European countries like Italy, Spain and Portugal have made similarly tiny contributions.

Other countries that fell short of their commitments include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Britain and Switzerland. Among these, Britain comes closest to meeting the target after paying 88 percent of its commitment of \$2.3 billion, according to figures released by the Department for International Development in Britain.

The only countries that have paid their share in full are Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The \$30 billion committed is only a third of the total requirement estimated at the ICPD, say the NGOs. The rest was to come from developing countries, which have produced a far greater share of their commitments than the developed countries. Much of the spending within developing countries has come from end users. Increased spending on reproductive health is necessary immediately to meet the millennium development goal of sexual and reproductive rights for all by 2015, the NGOs say.

● (IPS)

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DANGER: JOURNALISTS AT WORK

A new book with survival tips for reporters on dangerous assignments



War and violence rarely answer anything—but when they happen, journalists and other media staff have a crucial role in cutting through the fog of deception, lies and manipulation of information that inevitably follows. Their task is to show the impact on the lives of ordinary people. In taking on that role, journalists and others put their lives and safety at risk.

Every job has its risks, and journalists, whose job is to bring into the open what someone wants hidden, are at greater risk than most. But the risks today are unacceptably high. In some parts of the

world, harassment, threats and worse have become an unavoidable part of the job. While reporting on war or civil conflict the risks escalate and journalists lose their lives.

Attacks on journalists have a widespread chilling effect. They sap the ability of journalists to investigate and report and they deprive the public of the right to know. Sometimes this is the objective. Violence against journalists is often a deliberate policy by people who cheat, rob and inflict violence on their communities, so that they can avoid exposure and stay in the shadows.

Governments are sometimes directly

implicated in attacks on journalists. Most commonly, governments have an ambivalent attitude towards journalists, and do not regard it as a prime duty to protect them. Even governments who pride themselves on their democratic credentials put journalists at risk when they give the police or courts the right to seize material or pass laws requiring journalists to reveal sources or give up confidential information.

It is important to recall that of the 1,192 journalists killed since 1990, more than 90 percent were born and grew up in the land where they died. Foreign correspondents are the high-profile casualties, but most victims are local. When a victim is a journalist working in his or her own community, the news makes less impact elsewhere. Local journalists are at greater risk because they continue to live in areas from where they report. When the story is over, they cannot board a plane and fly away.

It takes the experience of those who have reported from and filmed in hostile zones and tries to draw lessons to save lives. But safety is not just an issue when bullets start flying. It is also about creating a culture of risk awareness in all aspects of journalism—whether in war zones, investigative reporting or reporting events from the streets.

Live News is a valuable guide to media practitioners, their bosses who send them to the field and to others who rely on media being in dangerous places. It attempts to spotlight the needs of local journalists, but

much of the available information comes from international correspondents and from training courses set up for the giants of the electronic media. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience amongst journalists who live and work on the front line of conflict and who have learned to survive while continuing to do their jobs. Those lessons and that knowledge need to be pooled and the courage and tenacity of those journalists needs to be honoured. This is a small step in that direction and this book is dedicated to these true heroes of our profession. ●



Live News:
A Survival Guide for Journalists

Peter McIntyre
IFJ Brussels, 2003
www.ifj.org
www.newssafety.com

“Everything stopped...then the car blew up”



Suhasini Haidar, a Delhi-based freelance reporter working for CNN

Srinagar, August 2000

“My car was at a traffic light when I heard a huge bang and I asked the driver to go towards the sound. We came to a narrow lane off a main market street. Someone had thrown a grenade into a car in the ditch. There

were four other correspondents as well as me. We looked at the remains of the grenade. Slowly police started to arrive—the local police and the army bomb squad. The car door was unlocked so it was suspicious, but we thought the danger had passed.

“I went with other journalists to try to get a quote from the police. Everything stopped around me. I tried to say ‘hey’ and the car blew up 10m in front of us. The cop pushed me down and said ‘stay down’—there was silence and then a volley of glass and incredible heat. Gas cylinders had exploded in the boot of the car. I saw the guy to my right go down. There were 19 people killed and you could see the blood. I realised I was hit.

“You need to do your homework. Double bombs are quite common—the first one draws the police and a crowd; then the second one goes off. I should have moved back from the car. I am more jumpy now, and I am a little more anxious around parked cars. I go to places of danger if it is an assignment, but not because I like to go to dangerous places.”

Extract from: *Live News: A Survival Guide for Journalists*



Nepal's endangered media

In the year since the collapse of the ceasefire last August, five Nepali journalists have been killed and 10 have gone missing, according to the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) in Kathmandu.

The Maoists tortured and publicly executed Gyanendra Khadka in Chautara

last year and in March killed former journalist and mayor of Birganj, Gopal Giri. Meanwhile, two journalists with the pro-Maoist *Janadesh* weekly Binod Chaudhary and Nagendra Pokharel were killed by the state as was Padma Devkota of the *Karnali Sandesh* newspaper.

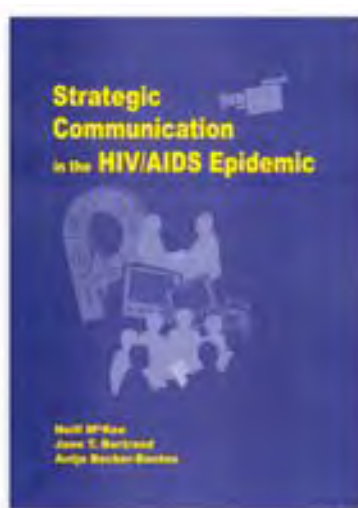
Earlier, eight journalists had been killed during the state of emergency by both sides while seven journalists were reported missing. The state illegally detained 61 journalists during that period and harassed others, the FNJ report says. The federation also reports numerous cases of harassment and beating of journalists while covering the anti-'regression' demonstrations earlier this year. “Security forces beat journalists and damaged their cameras even after they showed their press passes,” said the report.

BIGBEN



Guinness Book of World Records: First rhino to dive in a pelican.

BOOKWORM



Strategic Communication in the HIV/AIDS Epidemic
Neill McKee, Jane T Bertrand, Antje Becker-Benton
Sage, 2004
Rs 720

According to the authors, strategic communication is a promising response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic since it combines a series of important elements and is designed to stimulate positive and measurable behaviour change. Organised in a user-friendly manner and supported by case studies that illustrate the concepts and show how strategic communication has been employed in different developing countries, this book is an excellent tool designed for direct application in training and in designing communication programs.

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



ALL PICS: MOHAN MAINALI

Hundi Rawat (l, at right in pic) tells grieving relatives not to cry because the journalists are here. Her widowed daughter is in the middle.



Journalists from Doti, Kailali and Kanchanpur share their experiences at a meeting in Nepalganj.

Fed up with censorship by the CDO, reporter Bishnu Lal Buda in Dolpa bought his own fax machine.

“Please tell the world about our suffering”

Journalists from western Nepal talk about the hardships they face in reporting from the war zone

HASTA GURUNG in NEPALGANJ

Sprawled on the dirt outside her home, 56-year-old Hundi Rawat was weeping over the bodies of her four relatives and two neighbours. All were gunned down by an army patrol on the morning of 29 October 2002, when they were mistaken for Maoists. By chance, three journalists from Kathmandu happened to be passing by.

Most of the villagers were too shocked to speak. Hundi noticed the presence of the journalists and consoled the others: “Don’t worry, stop crying, they will take our news to the outside world.”

Mohan Mainali was one of the journalists, and still remembers being moved by how much hope those without hope still have on the power of the media. (See Mainali’s story ‘Our descendants are doomed’, #122). Earlier, the reporters had interviewed 82-year-old Surya Bahadur Giri. The Maoists had just destroyed the Food Corporation godown and blown up the Bajura airport building. Giri sat the reporters down beside him, and said: “It’s like the gods have come down

from heaven, thank you for caring to come and share our sorrow. Please, journalist sahibs, write about our suffering and tell the world.”

When there is nowhere else to turn, helpless Nepalis trapped by the conflict cling to reporters to pour out their sorrows. It seems there is some comfort in just being able to talk to someone. However, journalists are torn between chronicling facts, being involved and affected by the human tragedy all around them and the logistical nightmares involved in getting the stories out.

About 30 journalists from all over the western region met in Nepalganj last week to share the problems they face in reporting from conflict zones. Some were mundane problems, like not having access to fax and phone.

“There is only one phone in the whole district of Humla,” says Jaya Bahadur Rokaya, correspondent of *Kantipur* in Simikot. “Even that phone is in the CDO’s office. We can’t fax anything without him reading it, and sometimes he censors it.”

Reliance on the government

telecommunication affects not just objectivity, but as Suraj Kunwar in Accham says, also a journalist’s budget. “It costs up to Rs 80 to fax a page. You need to turn on the generator to get the fax machine to work and usually there is no petrol, and by the time my news lands in Kathmandu it is dated.”

Fed up with censorship by the CDO, Bishnu Lal Buda invested six months of his personal earnings to buy his own fax machine. The trouble was, electricity was erratic so he couldn’t use it when he needed to file a story.

For these and other journalists, journalism is a tightrope act—balancing conflicting pressures from the security forces and the Maoists. “We have to keep both sides happy for our own personal safety,” says Dan Singh Aira of the *Doteli Abaj* newspaper published in Doti. Lila Shah reports for *Himalaya Times* from Dang. “They pressure us to report things that they like, but the trouble is if one side likes it the other side is sure not to,” she says.

Radio journalist Pramita Jairu has a hard time preventing her equipment

from arousing the suspicions of both the Maoists and the security forces. “They really give me a hard time about my microphone and recorder,” she tells us.

Another radio reporter, Sumitra Chaudhary of the new Ghodaghodi FM in Kailali says security forces want to listen to all her interviews when she returns from assignment in outlying villages. “If I try to hide my identity as a journalist, it might be even worse because they may suspect I’m a Maoist,” she says. “And it also getting very difficult to find people to speak on radio, they are sacred they may get into trouble.”

Ganesh Chaudhary reports for *Kantipur* from Kailali and says both the Maoists and the security forces are increasingly sensitive about coverage. “They want us to play down negative news and play up material that makes them look good,” he says.

Closer to the Maoist heartland in Piuthan, reporters Numraj Khanal and Iman Singh Bharati regularly face interrogation from security forces if

they find out that they have been on a reporting trip into the villages. Luckily for them, though, the phones still work in Piuthan so there isn’t any big problem filing stories.

Almost all reporters have complaints about the desk editors in Kathmandu who do not understand the circumstances in which they work, how even a small omission or mistake in a story can have serious repercussions on safety. Downplaying or overplaying a story both create complications for reporters in the field.

Most journalists interviewed for this article had to be goaded to talk about their problems. Almost without exception they told us that their problems paled in comparison to the hardships, misery and fear that the people of western Nepal are going through. Says Mohan Mainali: “We can’t wait till conditions improve for journalists, Nepal’s crisis is too serious and a solution is required too urgently. It is our job to get these stories out.” ●



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HeroJig's Adventures can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Secret Moments** Paintings by Bhairaj Maharjan till 15 July at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4218048
- ❖ **Erotic Drawings** by Birendra Pratap Singh till 10 July at Buddha Gallery Zen Café, Thamel. 4441689
- ❖ **Monsoon Collection 2004** Paintings by various artists at Park Gallery, Lazimpat and Pulchowk, until 24 July.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Film Club:** *Dark Days*, Marc Singer (2000) 5.30 PM on 11 July at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Tickets: Rs 50. 5542544
- ❖ **Star Cruises** audio-visual presentation on Asia Pacific cruises. 3PM-7PM on 10 July at Hotel De l'Annapurna.
- ❖ **4th Bagmati River Festival** till 21 August
- ❖ **Just Divine Salsa Workshop** with Diego at Salsando Studio, Darbar Marg. 11-16 July, Rs 1,500 per person. **Just Divine Salsa Nite** at Rox Bar, 17 July. 7PM onwards, Rs 500 info@partynepal.com

MUSIC

- ❖ **Full Circle** 7PM Fridays at Bakery Café, Jawalakhel. 4434554
- ❖ **Deo** every Friday at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** with The Strings. 4256622

DRINKS

- ❖ **Free drink deals** at Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Monsoon Wine Festival** at Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Island Bar** with DJ Raju, Abhaya and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234

FOOD

- ❖ **Summit's Barbecue Dinner** with vegetarian specials. Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings. Radisson Hotel Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vaijayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali Lunch** at The Heritage courtyard. 4479488



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Bird watching escape** Shivapuri retreat with meals by Kilroy's. 4253352
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500
- ❖ **Bardia National Park** with Jungle Base Camp Lodge. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **Early Bird discounts** at Shangri-La Hotel & Resort. 4412999
- ❖ **Summer in Shivapuri** at Shivapuri Heights. 9851051780

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From its slam-bang start with Dennis Quaid dangling above a frozen crevasse by an ice axe that he hadn't been holding the moment before, to computer-generated timber wolves menacing Jake Gyllenhaal on board a Russian freighter that's frozen smack in the middle of Manhattan, *The Day After Tomorrow* defies logic at every turn with giddy, big-budget glee. Combine a disaster, an overly large cast and state-of-the-art special effects with a dumb script that takes itself far too seriously—what you get is a film that's both terrible and brilliant, providing a wealth of thrills, giggles and sarcastic asides to your seatmates. *The Day After Tomorrow* is campy, cliché-ridden and thoroughly enjoyable, all the way to its utterly preposterous ending.

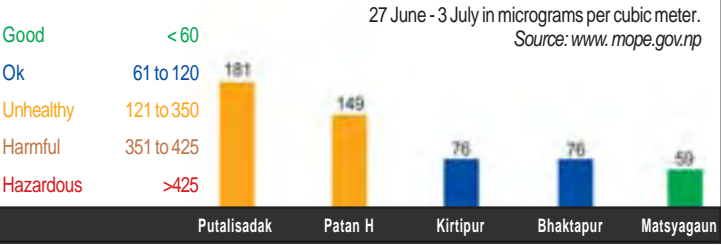
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JAI NEPAL CINEMA



KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

After last week's disappointing rise in PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body), levels dipped again slightly this week, with only the Kritipur monitoring station registering an increase in pollution. However, the air quality in Putali Sadak and around Patan Hospital remained in the 'unhealthy' range, and only Matsyagaun managed to fall in the 'good' category, just scraping by with 59 PM10.



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



After a worrying interruption, just as we were ready to officially pronounce its demise this year, the monsoon has suddenly resurrected. As this satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon shows, most of northern India and Nepal are now under a heavy cloud cover more normal for this time of year. Both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal arms of the monsoon are vigorous as they merge over central Nepal. Looks like the nocturnal naked ploughing by female farmers in Banke worked wonders. This current pulse of the monsoon will last into midweek next week. The valley will be drenched by passing showers, mostly at night. Maximum temperatures drops by three degrees.

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KIRAN PANDAY

UMBRELLA ORGANISATION: The main gate at Narayanhiti Palace was busy on Wednesday, as groups like this one arrived in the drizzle to celebrate King Gyanendra's birthday.



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

NEW MINISTER: Newly-appointed Information Minister Mohamad Mohasin (*centre*) with Durga Nath Sharma of Nepal Television and David Astly of the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union at a regional meeting on conflict coverage.



KIRAN PANDAY

NEW CABINETS: Brand new steel cabinets are delivered to Singha Darbar on Thursday as new ministers arrived at their offices.



KIRAN PANDAY

GAY PRIDE: A rally organised by the Blue Diamond Society near Bhadrakali on Monday protesting the sexual harrasment of homosexuals by the police.



KIRAN PANDAY

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN: Football fans show their support by baring all and having Greek and Portugese flags painted on as they wait for the EURO 2004 final at 1905, Kantipath on Sunday evening.

Man like Mahendra

What sets Mahendra Man Shaky apart, in his own words, is his ability "to see hope when things are bad". And that is a talent all of us could do with. 'Honda Man' (his high school name has stuck into adulthood) likes to think of himself as a social entrepreneur rather than a businessman. Moving into his family business, Mahendra Man discovered he had a knack for picking winners. When he went to Delhi to buy light fixtures for his home, he ended up in partnership with the dealer who agreed to supply not just his residence but the whole of Kathmandu. The family's light fixture showroom was the first of its kind in the Valley.

It wasn't until Mahendra Man landed in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1987 to work as an international youth counsellor in a Native American reservation that he realised money wasn't everything. "In the West, we are overwhelmed by the material aspect of life, but I realised there, in the middle of North America, it takes more than money to be happy," he recalls. Later in Boston, Mahendra Man took night school classes in economics, finance and accounting, and worked different jobs during the day.

The Nepali population in Boston hovered around 1,500, a number large enough to warrant an annual Dasain party. In 1992, Honda Man was elected president of the Greater Boston Nepali Community, but he was uncomfortable with the thought of making America home. "I believed a middle-class man like me would get better opportunities,

dignity and recognition in Nepal," he explains.

Returning to Nepal, Mahendra Man spent four years and two terms as the president of the Godavari Alumni Association (GAA), rejuvenating one of the oldest social service organisations in the country. When his term ends this week, Rajeev Pradhan and Ashutosh Tiwari are standing as candidates for president in elections on Saturday. "It has been a rewarding experience," says Mahendra Man of

his tenure at GAA. He now plans to spend more time playing and organising basketball tournaments. As secretary of the Nepal Basketball Association, Mahendra Man hopes to work the same magic he did for GAA.


He also hopes to devote more time to his pet venture, Momo King, a fast food chain that specialises in hygienic and healthy momos. With the success of the restaurant, Honda Man now has a new nickname: Momo King. ● (Alok Tumbahangphey)




KIRAN PANDAY

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Two news items that didn't quite make it

TOURISTS CAN CARRY FIREARMS

In a significant move to boost tourism, Nepal has become the first country in the world to henceforth allow visitors to bring in duty-free personal firearms. The first group of heavily-armed Indian tourists to avail of this new facility visited Nepal last week. Police in Thankot, who had not been apprised of the new rule, detained the pilgrims briefly.



UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

But they were released with profuse apologies from the Ministry of Tourism and Internal Security and whisked away to Pashupatinath. There they were required to deposit cameras at the gate, take off their shoes and leave their leather wallets, but were waved in carrying their submachine guns and assault rifles into the sanctum sanctorum.

"Shooting of photographs by Hindus is strictly prohibited inside the temple," explained a member of the Pashupati Trust, "but if groups of devotees want to engage in shootouts, we have no problems with that."

In a separate development, a group of Indian multi-billionaires flew into Kathmandu in their own Learjet this week on a brief pilgrimage to the shrines of Pashupatinath, Gujeswori and the Royal Everest Casino. Since they had heard that there was unrest in Nepal, the dignitaries brought grenade launchers, bazookas and 71mm mortars with them.

However, the scion of one of India's biggest steel barons was detained at airport customs for having in his possession more perambulators and tricycles than is legally allowed to be imported into Nepal. He was finally let in after demonstrating to authorities that the said items were actually cleverly disguised rocket launchers and tripod-mounted howitzers.

JUMBO CABINET MEETS

The venue for the first scheduled meeting of the new jumbo cabinet had to be changed Thursday after not everyone fit into the conference room in Singha Darbar.

The cabinet then met at the Dasrath Stadium and, in order not to waste any more time, quickly got down to items on the agenda that needed urgent attention. It was brought to the notice of the prime minister that some of his new inductees weren't wearing black coats and topis, and they were immediately dispatched to Dormeuil on Putali Sadak to have new suits made at the taxpayer's expense.

The prime minister then laid the ground rules for his new administration, which included: an immediate ban on all mother-in-law jokes during cabinet meetings. But back-stabbing, tongue-lashing, paying lip service, pulling each other's legs, idle banter and other demonstrations of camaraderie and bonhomie would be encouraged, he said.

The prime minister noted that he had learnt from mistakes during his previous two tenures and this time he would try not to repeat them. "For example, in order to prevent the government from making serious blunders, we will not take any decisions," he instructed his cabinet. "We won't actually be doing anything, so there is no way we will make any mistakes."

Meanwhile, disgruntled members of various parties in the coalition who were not included in the expanded cabinet have decided to form their own party called RPPUMLNSPNC (Disgruntled). Spokesperson of this new anti-coalition coalition, Roshan Karki, who looked quite disgruntled, told newshounds: "We will not allow this government to do nothing, unless the prime minister expands his cabinet to 102 members and gives us all portfolios so we can also do nothing."

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